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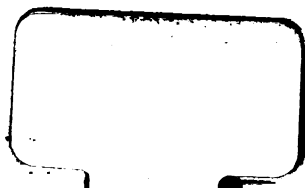
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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.



VOL. I.

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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

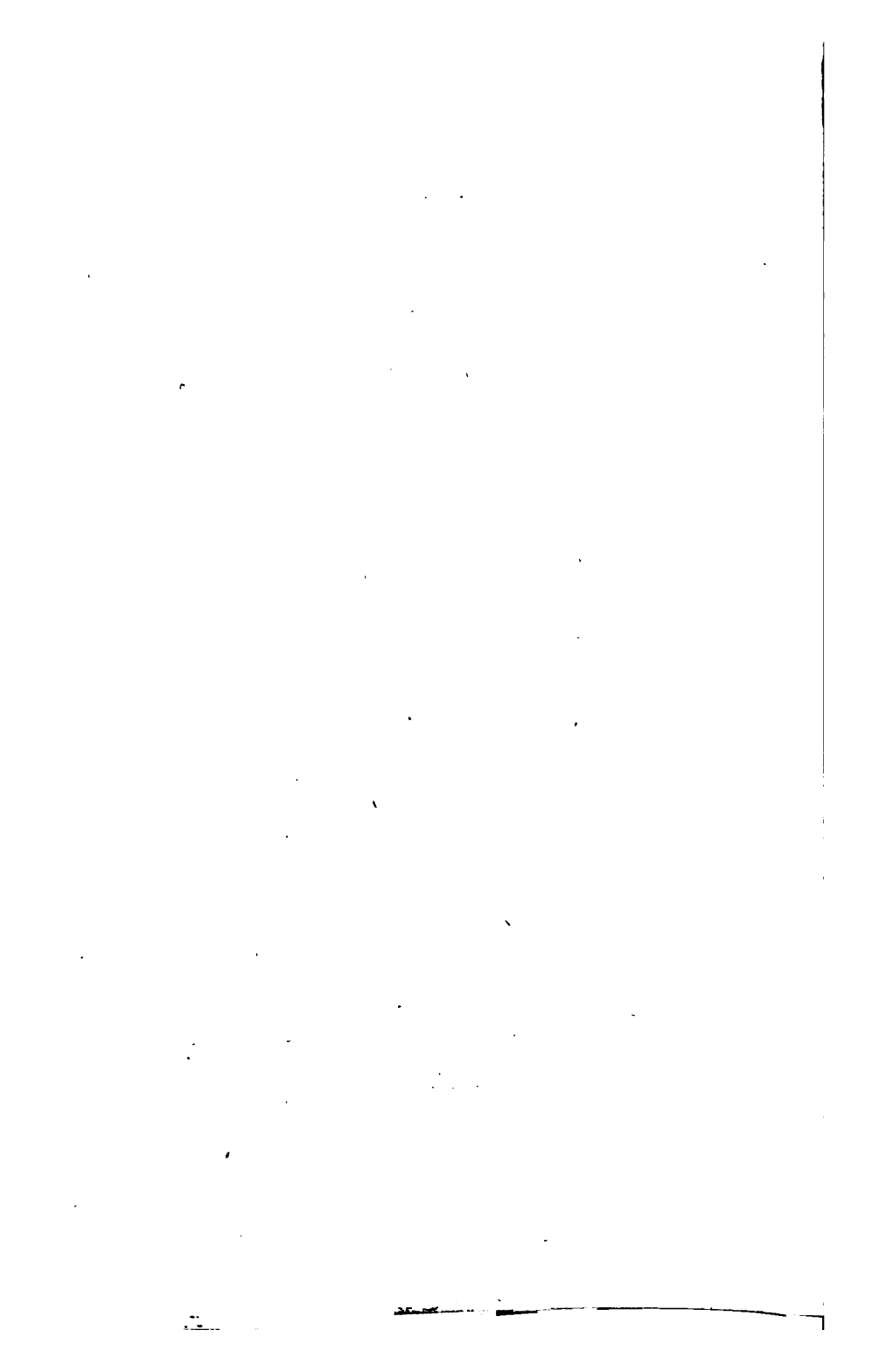
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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

CHAPTER I.

"Weave we the woof; the thread is spun."—GRAY.

"MABEL, my love," said Mrs. Abney to her niece, Mabel Somers, "pray do come and find out where the mistake lies in this work of mine: I have taken out and put in again several times, and cannot make it right, alter as I may."

Mrs. Abney looked quite heated and harassed as she lifted up her face from her embroidery. The young girl she had addressed put down her book, arose from the low ottoman she was occupying at the open window, and approached her with a smiling face.

"Ah! Auntie dear; I told you how tedious you would find this Arabesque pattern. One stitch wrong, and you are wrong altogether; but let me try what I can do with it."

So Mabel sat down to the frame, and at once commenced a scrutinizing examination; counting here, counting there and everywhere, to detect where the mischief lay.

"I have found it—I have found it; what will you give me for it! see, this is where you are wrong, Auntie; you have turned this scroll too soon; there are seven stitches to be taken across, and you have got four only; so it has thrown you quite out of your pattern."

"What an inexplicable mystery that sort of work seems!" said a gentleman who had been conversing with Mr. Somers in another part of the spacious drawing-room, but who had now approached them, and was peering at the embroidery from under his spectacles; "I could understand that there would be a certain degree of pleasure in making baby-linen, or shirts, or gowns, or, indeed, any article of utility to be worn; but in what the delight consists of taking stitch upon stitch for no earthly purpose, is to me a marvel and a wonder."

"Will you try to find out for yourself *where* the pleasure lies, doctor?" asked the young Mabel, with a merry laugh; "if you will, I will commence a piece of work for you to practise on, and initiate you into all the needful particulars."

"I cannot myself see why the ornamental should not be esteemed as well as the useful," observed Mrs. Abney, "especially when the pursuit of it answers a highly beneficial purpose, as it very often does. Sir Robert Ingram showed me, the other day, a most beautiful hearth-rug of his own working; and he said, 'no one could credit the pleasure, and, indeed, benefit, he had derived from working it; it was more than he could have deemed possible.' And you know yourself, Doctor, that our Dean has quite mastered that distressing attack on the nerves, solely from setting about and completing an altar-cloth."

"Exactly; but do you not see the *morale* of these instances—the nut that lies within the shell—that it is giving people something to do that benefits them?" asked Dr. Merridan; "and if their capacities rise no higher than wool-working, why it is not only justifiable, but commendable that they should practise it; but I should have thought that a printing-press, or turning-lathe, or wood engraving, or anything in fact that would bring into exercise a somewhat higher faculty, might have been tried to remove the *tædium vitæ*; employment more mentally elevating than that of boring stitches through canvass might surely be found."

"It is something akin to Hercules throwing down his club, and taking up the distaff; is it not, Merridan?" said Mr. Somers, with an amused smile; "but a dull expedient to hit on, for bringing bubble and sparkle to life's wine-cup, I should have thought."

"Dull for dull people, perhaps," returned Mrs. Abney, with a pertinacious air; "but nevertheless, very agreeable occupation, and I do not wonder at gentlemen taking to it. Are you quite sure, Mabel, that one little error is all that needs rectifying?"

"Quite sure, Auntie; shall I take it out for you?"

"Do, love; I am quite weary of it."

Patiently, stitch by stitch did Mabel take out the wrong portion, and make it all ready for Mrs. Abney proceeding with.

Whilst she is so doing, suppose we glance round the noble room in which they were assembled; spacious, lofty, its fine coved ceiling was painted in exquisite design and colour; its walls glowing with gems which a king's ransom could scarce purchase; no harsh or inharmonious subjects, nor yet vivid, startling contrasts; but forms and delineations of beauty were they all—refined and cultivated the taste, masterly the eye of him who had brought them

together. The bronzes, and models in silver, the nameless and numberless objects of *vertu*, scattered upon the marble tables; the costly mirrors and hangings; the delicate white carpet, with its warmly tinted bouquets, giving tone to the luxurious simplicity which distinguished the whole array and furnishing; all bore testimony to the presiding taste of one, whose eye required elegance of form, perfection of colour—demanded beauty for its aliment.

He, the owner of the mansion of Somerton, whose taste had thus stamped itself, sat somewhat apart, at a table littered over with books; quietly turning over the pages of one, and examining its illustrations with critical attention. Very distinguished was his appearance; not alone a finely developed person, and unusually handsome face made it so; but there was the impress of the "heart of courtesy" in addition to physical symmetry of form and feature; the innate courtesy which, the wide world over, stamps the gentleman; which no rank or position can ensure, no training call into life. We see it occasionally in the cottager of low degree; we do not always find it clothed in purple and fine linen. But, unmistakeably did Adrian Somers possess it; as unmistakeable also was the evidence of intellectual power

and vigorous thought in the expansive brow, and in the firm, but benignant gaze of the large dark eyes ; their expression told of one earnest and composed, who could rule others, from the power of habitual command and self-command which in him lay.

In the full vigour of life was Mr. Somers ; with his mind most master of and conscious of its powers ; with its perceptions still widely open to the new and beautiful ; with the affections yet warmly quickening ; with the blossom and fruit on the same bough. Of an age when man hath not yet felt his mortality, nor the evil days drawn nigh, when he saith, "I have no pleasure in them." Early had he married ; early become a widower. Mrs. Abney, his sister, some ten years older than himself, had for a considerable period presided as the mistress of his household. Quite a Lady Bountiful was she in the village of Somerton ; possessing the country gentlewoman's *penchant* for dabbling in medicine for all the ailing people around her : she had now pinned her faith to homœopathy, which caused her and Dr. Merridan to assume a very antagonistic position, and also to hold many lengthy arguments, in which the lady's pertinacity made up for what she lacked in knowledge ;

no fault could be found with her zeal in the cause; the brighter did it seem to burn for the Doctor's opposition. The arguments generally ended in a little snappishness on his part; always did he buckle on his armour for the occasion, and took no thrust that he did not return one for it.

But they were excellent friends on the whole, spite of these little jars and disagreements.

Both a beauty and a belle had Mrs. Abney been, but she had, with much good sense, forgotten all about it; though now and then, when looking at her young niece, she wondered whether she had herself ever been so fair. Then, the echoes of sweet flattering words would fall again upon her ear, and the language of delicious homage, addressed to her in her days of youth and beauty, would be heard once more.

She recalled them with mingled smiles and tears, for true love had early come, and, with its honied breath, extinguished all other fancies; all desire for any voice, save the one which had awakened responsive music in her own young heart. She had passed from Somerton a very girl, but adorned with loveliness, and passing rich in love.

A few short years, and, tracking Love's footsteps, came Death. She was a widow ; and a widow she remained. When Mr. Somers lost his young wife, he wrote to his sister : " There need not, dearest Anna, be two desolate hearths ; come to me. As the home of your youth, this place will be endeared to you ; you can take from its deep sadness to me ; you can be a mother to my child—"

She came ; and had not again left Somerton, acting as its undisputed mistress, making it cheerful to her brother, and caring, with almost maternal love, for his one idolized child. Mabel, now about sixteen, was on the borderland of womanhood, and growing up most beautiful ; a fairer, lovelier presence none ever saw.

The only other person of the group in the drawing-room of Somerton Hall was the Doctor. And Dr. Luke Merridan must by no means be passed by without an introduction to our reader. An excellent creature was he, and the most dreamy and absent that well could be ; doing the oddest, strangest things at times, when under the pressure of an absent fit, that man could do : this, perhaps, in a *dilettante*, was not unusual, and those who knew him well were prepared for his oddities and whimsies ; ready to remind him of time, place,

and circumstance, or to repeat a question several times over, if need were.

Notwithstanding this dreaming in broad daylight, he was a most shrewd, clever person, devoted to, and very skilful in his profession; and had the kindest heart in the world, testy and snappish though he was. His means were ample; and he liked nothing better than giving—as the sick and the needy soon found, to their great comfort.

The Doctor was always busy,—people might encroach upon anything but his time; let a non-professional demand upon that come, and he snarled at once. “Idlers had no right to fasten themselves upon workers!” he said, with perfect truth. Between him and Mr. Somers there had existed a twenty years’ friendship, which had commenced at Heidelberg. When the young candidate for diplomas was studying at the far-famed university, and Mr. Somers was travelling through Germany, they accidentally met; and some hidden sympathy drew them into liking, and to after-correspondence.

When Mr. Somers married, he was anxious to have a medical man at Somerton; and the Doctor, who had in the meantime graduated with honours, was persuaded to come and

settle amongst them—a step he had never regretted, though, of course, it effectually barred him from what is so captivating to most young, energetic, ardent minds, the ambition of name and fame; wholly did he lay it aside, and set before himself one higher still—the ambition of usefulness.

Some scarce understood link, or tie, did there seem to exist between himself and Mr. Somers. For him alone would he sacrifice his time uncomplainingly; for him only thrust aside his microscope to which he was usually a most patient slave; to him, ungrudgingly, devote the leisure which his membership of some half-dozen learned societies, (from the Royal Society downwards,) loudly demanded for their own especial use and benefit.

To him, and for him, would he give time, and trouble, and thought—nay, to judge from his countenance occasionally, when the two were conversing, you might feel sure that he would not halt at life itself, to do Adrian Somers service.

Years had not particularly chronicled themselves upon the Doctor's face and figure, he had probably never looked very young; but now, the glasses which he always wore, and the furrows, ploughed by deep thought

in his forehead, would make a boy call him "an old fellow, enough," a young man say, "he was of middle age." In reality, he was somewhat younger than Mr. Somers; dressed in professional black, always, and rejoiced in the most unimpeachable shirt collars, folded down to a nicety over the neckerchief, and in the deepest wristbands, of the finest linen and of immaculate whiteness.

"There, Auntie," at length said Mabel, "I have made your embroidery all ready for your going on with again."

Mrs. Abney thanked her heartily; and Mabel rose and walked to a window, of which there were four, all thrown open to a broad terrace. The richly embroidered transparent curtains, underneath the drapery of pale blue brocade, rose and fell with the fresh soft breeze of that April evening; redolent it was of the breath of flowers,—of primrose, violet, and hyacinth. Into the lap of May was April sinking, and their tender dalliance was delightful to sight and sound. The many-voiced birds were gaily calling to each other, and carolling their love-songs; the blackbird and mavis were pouring out gushes of woodland minstrelsy; the cuckoo, with its soft, musical monotone, was

heard, now near, anon farther off; and over all, showered down the golden sun-tints, decking earth in smiles, as for her bridal.

The young girl stood admiring the scene, her eye kindling with pleasure as it rested on the distant masses of finely disposed timber, and then reverted to nearer groups of magnificent horse-chestnuts, with their blooms of lamp-like lustre. The wide-spreading, undulating park was studded with them; its rich, fresh tone of verdure finely contrasting with the delicate yet glowing beauty of the coned flowers.

Long she stood, with a look of intense enjoyment upon her fair young face, as she scanned glade and grove; but she at length left the window, and approached her father, who was still occupied in his examination of the engravings.

"An' it please my Papa," she said, in a soft, most musical voice, as she stood beside him, "it is our time for going on the lawn."

Mr. Somers neither turned nor spoke; though the smile which stole over his countenance told plainly he had heard her.

She laid one dainty hand caressingly upon his shoulder, and bent down her sweet, laughing face till it was on a level with his own.

"Do you know the time, Papa *mignon*? look there," pointing to an or-molu clock as she spoke, "and see the long shadows are falling."

Very smilingly did she address him; and he now lifted his head, and gave her back a smile as beaming as her own.

"Then we will go out to our game, love," he said, as he rose from his chair, and fondly touched her sunny cheek with the silver paper cutter he held in his hand.

"Will you go with us, Doctor, or stay with my sister, and discuss this ever-verdant subject, homœopathy? But come; there are some new plants arrived to-day,—some heaths and orchids, I think you would like to see. Will you not also go with us, Anna? the evening is very enjoyable."

Mrs. Abney thought she would; and all bent their steps to the greenhouse together. Mabel took her father's arm; and when thus near to each other, you saw what a vivid likeness she bore to him; unmistakeably did his blood flow in her veins; yet was it so mixed up, and blended with beauty of a totally different order—a laughing, dimpling loveliness—that even as you traced the resemblance, you lost it; and turning away for an instant, found it again.

The plants were duly examined and admired; the Doctor taking off his glasses, that he might observe them the better, which proceeding drew down upon him a gay jest from Mabel, and made him plead guilty to seeing better without them. It was not only great nonsense, but a pity, that he should wear them, for though he was not at all good-looking, he had, when you saw him without the spectacles, particularly pleasant, clear grey eyes, mild enough in their expression generally, but when he got earnest and interested, such a deep, dark light (you might almost call it fire) flashed into them, and lit up and vivified his whole face.

'The party left the greenhouse, and walked along the terrace, till they reached that part of the lawn where Mr. Somers and his daughter usually played their favourite game of "La Grace."

"Now, Papa, you must put forth all your skill, for I am going to play my very, very best. Oh, Aunt, pray do not go in!" exclaimed Mabel.

"Do stay," added Mr. Somers, "here are plenty of sticks and hoops; suppose you and the Doctor stand up together, and see how you can acquit yourselves."

Mrs. Abney smilingly shook her head, to put a negative on the proposal ; whilst the Doctor, as he drew a book out of his pocket, and established himself in a rustic seat, said, spitefully—

“ That he supposed the game was not put down in the list of permitted homœopathic recreations.”

It was a perfect picture, to watch the young girl's light footsteps, as she bounded hither and thither, and her lithe figure, which bent with the most willowy grace to every requisite movement of the game. Her dress set off her elegant, sinuous form admirably ;—of thin, gauzy material, she wore over it a black velvet jacket, open at the bosom, where a bouquet of rich camellias was fastened ; a slight net of silver thread confined the abundant hair at the back of her most graceful head.

A wonderful spirit of joy possesses her, as she stands, glowing with the exercise ; her sweet, silvery laughs ringing out constantly, in gay jesting with her aunt and the Doctor ; and in affected scoldings of the hoops, for their *escapades* from her, she is brimming o'er with youthful, most elastic gaiety, and in exquisite delight of life. Heaven and earth had rained blessings on her young days ; no chill, no care had ever yet drawn nigh.

But beautiful as she is, and bright and sunny as is her look, still does an added lustre come, whenever she meets her father's eye, and smiles in answer to his smile; such a beamingness of love is written on it, as seems to angelize the face, and stamp it as something more than mortal, in its fresh, sparkling rosebud, rose-lipped beauty.

"I shall send your bonnet, Mabel," said Mrs. Abney, at length rising to return to the house, "it is getting a little damp for you."

"A handkerchief instead, please; I cannot play with my bonnet on."

The handkerchief was brought; carelessly thrown over her head, and knotted under her chin. Scarcely could anything have set off the blooming face more.

"I see you study the becoming, Miss Mabel," said the Doctor; for an instant lifting his eyes from his book.

"Of course I do," she replied, with much laughing emphasis and glee.

Again the hoops sped backwards and forwards. A favourite amusement was it with them; and they practised the graceful game almost daily.

"What *has* become of the Doctor?" exclaimed Mr. Somers, as the evening growing

dusk, they at length prepared to leave the lawn, and found that he was gone.

"Spirited away by some wood-fiend or other, no doubt," said the gay Mabel with a laugh. "No, *there* he is, Papa." He had changed his seat for the advantage of more light; so absorbed was he that he neither saw nor heard their approach; and Mabel went and playfully peeped over his shoulder.

"Reading a novel, I declare. No,—oh! what a dreary book. Somebody, upon something or other. How can you, on such a sweet, bright evening as this, give yourself up to such horrid reading? Do you *never* read an ordinary book like other people?"

"Sometimes I indulge so far," said the Doctor, laughing; "I read *Punch* and the papers; and the Bible and Shakspeare,—I keep *him* under my carriage cushions,—and that's sufficient list for mind and soul, too; isn't it, Miss Mabel? But you are quite mistaken about my present book. Do you know the work? 'tis by the pen of a master," he said, as he handed it to Mr. Somers.

"Humboldt's *Cosmos*, I see. No—I do not; and I am not sufficiently master of the German to read it as you do in the original. Is there any translation?"

"Yes,—there is one, executed by a lady, very fair and literal, but of course not equal to the original."

"It is all very well for the Doctor to look down upon translations; is not it, Papa?" said Mabel, with her clear sweet laugh ringing out like a silver bell. "Oh, you are surely not thinking of going in!" she exclaimed, as they turned and moved slowly to the house; "it is such a soft warm evening; do let us stroll up and down and enjoy it."

"But you must have something more on, my darling, if we remain out."

"I will go and get a warm shawl and my bonnet immediately, dear Pa."

"Aye, and thicker shoes too," said the Doctor.

She hurried away; soon returning, however, muffled in a warm wrapper; a most symmetrical foot did she hold up, that the Doctor might inspect her shoes, which he pronounced sensible enough.

Slowly they paced up and down the double-avenue of elms, for some time, silently watching the serene stars coming out one by one; and the waxing moon rise up to steep the world in solemn beauty. The night was hushed and tranquil; the tender spring leaves stirring

fitfully with a soft, dallying breeze, which slumbered and then rose again in gentle Eolian murmurs.

A very pretty and endearing way had Mabel when walking with her father, altogether child-like though it was—that of clasping her two hands over his arm, so that her face was directed towards him. Thus was she walking now; her eyes upraised to his; and they were, and the whole face was, gushing over with love.

Intense pleasure was in the gaze which met her own; yet sad memories or thoughts were surely mingling with that pleasure. It might be that she was too like her dead mother—so passionately loved, so early lost,—for him to look calmly on her; it might be, we know not what; but her quick eye saw and read, though she understood not, that mingled strife of emotion; and seeing it, she bent down her glowing lips to his hand, and most fervently kissed it.

“Papa, dear, dear Papa,” she softly murmured, her voice thrilling with feeling.

Less than most men was Adrian Somers liable to lose his self-command; yet surely that was a tear that fell, glistening in the bright moonlight. But soon was he calm

again, and in animated discussion with the Doctor, who was a bountiful talker.

The young Mabel had been regarding the lady moon with a very sentimental gaze; and she at length said,

"What a pretty imagining it is, that there are nights when music-strains may be heard floating down from heaven!"

"Ah, indeed! that's something new. Pray what may be the particular occasion of the harmonies, Miss Mabel?"

"Have you never read of it? It is one of the sweetest fancies possible. They are faint echoes of blessed angels' songs, which rise when happy spirits reach their heavenly home."

"Ah, it's rather a German idea, I think," said the Doctor, sarcastically.

"Why, it is only the sick, or the dying, or holy minded persons, (in their very heart of hearts loving God,) who *can* hear heaven's music, you know. Often have I tried to catch these strains, to keep awake and listen intently; but I never heard angel voices, or aught more than the minstrel winds. Indeed, I always fall asleep. It is very vexing to sleep so readily and soundly.

The perfectly simple, *naïf* way in which Mabel uttered the last sentence, made both

Mr. Somers and the Doctor laugh; the latter fairly chuckled again, till at length she, though looking somewhat disconcerted, joined in the laugh against herself.

"May your shadow never be less, Miss Mabel; and may you long have the vexation of sound sleep," said the Doctor, when he had recovered somewhat of his gravity.

A little chagrined though she was, Mabel returned once more to the subject, about which the disbelieving Doctor again avowed himself most thoroughly incredulous: he should have faith in them when he heard them, he said,—Mabel almost lost all patience; and Mr. Somers changed the conversation by saying,

"What is it, I wonder, that makes one serious, and almost sad in gazing at moon-lit and starry skies, and which also stirs within us that poetic element, so at one with our being, the mixture of the ideal with the positive and actual? The human blent and mingling with the spiritual—the horse with wings;—I know you rather misdoubt the *general* existence of this poetic element, Meridan."

"I believe he misdoubts everything, Papa," observed Mabel with considerable energy of voice and manner.

The Doctor took another chuckle to himself ere he replied,

"I think you must lift the weeds, before you find the violets."

"And yet the violets are there, though the weeds may cover them from sight."

"Take the world as we find it, men and women together, at least one-half are clothed in the 'muddy vesture of indifference;' only animals—only sensible in the duller parts."

"The world is very guilty in this respect, I grant you. Too many have never fed on the 'dainties' that are bred in a book, but yet is the poetic element rife; they can admire the golden clouds that gather about the departing sun, and the firmament sowed thick with stars lights up reverence, (which is high poetry,) in their hearts. No, whilst man speaks gently to woman, and prizes her smile; whilst he values his home, and loves his children; the divinity within him is stirring, is quick, not dead."

"Ah! you look at this hand-to-mouth existence with a poet's eye, through a prismatic medium. I'm a practical sober-minded man,—light is light, and dark is dark, to me."

"You err in what you say about your prosaic views. A high appreciation of life's poetry

you have. You both may and ought to plead guilty to the soft impeachment, Luke."

"I do not, and ought not."

"Well, no matter, the verdict 'proven' is the same. I put aside your words, and appeal to your life for the truth of what I say. Human life is instinct and overflowing with poetry; it is 'in the words of Mercury and the songs of Apollo;' in the wise experience of the aged, and the joyful hope of the young. My little girl here can scarce converse without embodying poetic sentiments and fancies."

"Nay, dear Pa, you are quite wrong now."

"I am quite right, my young daughter," said he, turning to her with a fond glance. "Poetry, ideality—call it what you will—is no vague imagination; it is inmost truth. The higher and sublimer the truth, the more subtle and fine its poetry. It sparkles over life, mellows and purifies it, shedding down light and warmth. It is about us from our birthtime, till we sink into the grave's rest. Sorrow makes us poetical; joy developes it. It hovers and trembles on the lips of those who love. It is the very essence of religion and faith."

"It may be true, perhaps," argued the Doctor, "that all this fine-spun poetic sentiment is to be found in the lives and minds of

those who, as it were, stand aside and let the world sweep past them; but life's work and business is wholly inimical to it."

"So think not I, and I could multiply instances in favour of what I say; instances taken from the lives of those immersed in business, nay, of toil for daily bread—hard-working, hard-living men, with horny hands."

"And how is a manual labourer to find time for aught beside sleeping, eating, working—the stern realities under which he lives? He is on a sort of treadmill, where, if he waits a moment, he is certain to get a pretty smart rap upon the shins, by way of reminder."

"Yet is he something more than mere eater, sleeper, worker. A golden thread is inwoven with his earth-chains: with all, I believe, it is to be found; with many it gilds the whole. I am quite sure, Doctor, there is a marriage covenant between human life and the poetic or idealic sentiment; and divorce you cannot, for 'tis a heavenly visitant, a spark or ray of that which is to come. But we must not get too argumentative. Suppose we go in to the fire-side now: you'll admit that there is great comfort, if not poetry, in that?"

"I'll admit both the comfort and the poetry of it," said the Doctor, briskly.

Mabel skipped up the broad stone steps by which you gained the massive doorway, two steps at a time, and laughingly challenged the others to do the same; Griffiths, her maid, was in waiting to take her warm wrappers, and give her a change of shoes. Mrs. Abney's attention to these things was most assiduous.

"Now, Doctor," said Mr. Somers, as they re-entered the drawing-room, "I engage you to look after this young lady's health whilst I am in town: I dare not in this matter place her under my sister's *surveillance*, lest, in case of any indisposition, she should be trying the effect of homœopathic medicaments upon her."

"Willingly do I accept the charge, though I do not suppose that homœopathic medicines could do her any harm whatever."

"And might probably do her good," retorted Mrs. Abney.

"I confess to a prejudice against it altogether, madam."

"Ah, Doctor, *why* will you listen to prejudice? you know it is the greatest possible barrier to improvement. I feel sure that if you would only study the principles of homœopathy, you would become its warm partizan."

"I *have* studied, and tested too. I have so many homœopathic books upon my shelves,

that I am sometimes tempted to burn my library."

"Never you hope to convince the Doctor, Auntie," said Mabel: "he belongs to the family of the Doubters, and credits nothing save that there are three sides to a triangle, and four to a square."

A laughing eye did he turn upon her as she spoke, and again came his merry chuckle.

"A wiser man than I am ever like to prove advised us to believe nothing that we hear, and only half of what we see; and even then we shall be too credulous. What think you of that, Miss Mabel?"

"But what has that to do with our subject?" asked the pertinacious Mrs. Abney.

"Only this, that we hear a great deal, and see nothing. It's jugglery altogether, depend upon it. Why, the very hypothesis on which it is founded, and which it trumpets forth as a discovery, is as old as the hills."

"Ah, you prejudge it, because it runs counter to the creed in which you were trained."

"There you touch me. Most unfit should I be for the high and holy, aye, and very onerous duties of a physician, if I suffered myself to ride off upon prejudice, or believe that we had arrived at the end of all knowledge.

We are as yet but in its day-dawn, and can form but faint conceptions of what that day will be in its meridian splendour. 'Light, more light!' should be the hastening prayer of all. But for this homœopathy, 'tis but a rank weed in the highway of knowledge; flaunting and staring it stands; but it will take no root in the land; the soil isn't favourable."

"And yet we hear of wonderful cures from its system of treatment."

"Of letting alone, you mean. There are such things as maladies existing only in the imagination; and for these, faith in something new is a fine specific. Not to speak profanely, 'tis 'the one thing needful' in the cure. I grant that homœopathy has its uses; it is all very well for high-born dames, 'lilies who neither toil nor spin,' to fiddle-faddle with themselves, and their diet tables, and imbibition of delicate globules. They are occupied and interested, and do themselves no harm. As times go, there is a degree of virtue in that."

"Well, I don't know, but it was said that poor dear Lady Blandford must have died much sooner, but for homœopathic treatment."

"Lady Blandford was starved to death; yes, starved, rioting in plenty. Martyred, but not

canonized, was she. Oh, dear, dear! to see how people yield up their judgment to every lying charlatan who speaks great swelling words; every fluffy fellow may lead the public by the nose. So that a theory be new, it will very certainly find acceptance. So that it be utterly incomprehensible, thousands will flock to the standard, and swell the cry, 'Eureka!' The more it sets at nought common sense, the more successful it will be. Bah! I'm sick of this world's nonsense: where effrontery battens upon ignorance, and idleness takes refuge from vacuity in every passing folly."

"Don't scold so, Doctor, you are really getting warm."

"It does vex me, I grant, to hear such gross absurdities defended. 'Truth lies in a well,' it is said, and there it will lie, for any existing power in homœopathy to bring it to the surface. It is an audacious thing to call upon the human mind to credit that the effect of medicine is enhanced by the diminution of the dose. If true in part, it would be true in the whole; for Nature never outrages consistency—is never at war with herself; and then it *must* follow, that the less food we took the better we should be; or, the smaller the poison dose, the more surely it would kill. 'Tis a downright stupid

fallacy, but 'every dog will have his day,' wherein he may yelp and snarl to his heart's content, but after that the usual fate awaits him."

"What is that?" asked Mrs. Abney.

"Death and forgetfulness. There is no principle of vitality in this particular dog, Ma'am, to save him from the common lot. Indeed, I should not wonder if he were kicked to death."

"He was getting almost vicious," Mrs. Abney, with a calm smile, said; "she was sorry to see him so put out."

"I'm not ruffled, not at all. I only pity the weak-minded and ignorant receivers of such empiricism."

She laughed; and he laughed too, though his face still wore an angry hue, and he twirled his spectacles incessantly.

"Well, I certainly cannot argue with you, Doctor, because all the knowledge is on your side."

"I know it; I am quite aware it is," returned he triumphantly. "You have Faith, and I have Works, to go on."

"But still—nevertheless," enunciated Mrs. Abney, with the look and tone of one ready to be slain rather than move from her position, "It is a fact that I am not in the least convinced of the unsoundness of homœopathy."

"Anna—Merridan, for any sake have done," broke in Mr. Somers, who had taken refuge in a game at chess with his daughter when the wordy encounter commenced. "Woe's me, that I should introduce that apple of discord between you! We'll place it for the future under ban and interdict. I'm sure, Anna, the Doctor may as well talk to a woolpack as to you, with that persistent, unreasoning faith of yours. Mabel, my love, give us some music, and see if you can restore harmony between these contentious people."

"Harp or piano?" she asked, with much alacrity.

"The piano, love; play the accompaniment to 'Crambambuli,' and soothe the Doctor's vexed soul by bringing back to memory his student's days."

"Oh, the royal days!" he exclaimed, lighting up in a moment. "Life's festival-time—its jubilee!"

None of the accustomed lady-like indifference to her own performance did Mabel show, for she was passionately fond of music. Ever did she sing, in the great fulness and content of her young happiness, as she moved in and about the house; and out of it listen with such a charmed ear to the wild melodies of birds—

the organ-peal of winds and trees. "Hush ! hark !" would she say, as she bounded over dewy meads, or through flowery dells ; and stand with arrested step and kindling eye, drinking in the varied sounds of wood and stream ; and her bright cheek would glow with a brighter hue, and her young fresh soul stir and quicken with delicate pleasure, as into its very centre wafted those sweet and airy harmonies.

Homœopathy, and all such like vexations, were forgotten by the Doctor, in the enjoyment of music and of song. " I shall see you to-morrow, Luke," said Mr. Somers, when he took his leave.

" We shall not have another ' Good night ' for the present, Pa, darling," said Mabel, as, with a hand in each of his, she stood chatting ere she retired to her room ; " but you will come back to me very soon ; I shall be so lost without you. I think it will be a week's absence. A whole week you will be in that horrid Babylonish place ; not a day longer will I allow ; so remember, my Papa."

And she kindled her fair arched brow into something as near akin to a frown as she could well assume ; and compressed her beautiful mouth, so as to look very stern and terrible,

by way of showing him how awful the displeasure he would incur by any prolonged absence from her.

"Not a day or an hour longer than business absolutely requires my presence, my Mab. But you must write every day—pour out your whole heart in your letters for me to see, and you must be very gay and happy with your cousins, at Beechwood."

"I will—I will. But you will write to me daily, and let the very first letter tell your day of return; be sure to do this, Papa; I do *not* like your going away from me, Pa."

A soft tremor stole into her voice as she spoke; and the white, drooping lids fell over the lustrous eyes at the bidding of that gentle sorrow.

His arm passed round her slender, girlish form, and he drew her to him—pressed her fervently to his breast.

"The Father in heaven bless you, my own darling, as well as the father on earth!"

"And God bless you—you, dearest Papa," she murmured, when thus pressed to him.

CHAPTER II.

"Delights are ever about and around,
Cunningly hidden, yet easily found :
Pleasures refined, yet sweet to the crowd,
Common—yet precious as pure to the proud."—*Anon.*

WHEN Mr. Somers entered the sunny breakfast-room the next morning, he found it vacant ; though there was evidence of recent presence, in a vase of beautiful fresh-cut flowers, standing in the centre of the breakfast-table. A bouquet of choice greenhouse blooms was lying beside Mrs. Abney's plate, and placed on the snowy damask, beside his own, was a bunch of myosotis ; the dew yet sparkling on the bright blue flowers.

No lover could kiss a flower offering from one who formed his heart's delight with more vivid pleasure than did Mr. Somers his young daughter's graceful tribute to himself. Taking them in his hand, he stepped through the open window to the sloping lawn, which lay basking in delicious greenness under the genial April sun. Branching off, and separated from the lawn on one side by a low wire fence, was a

portion of the gardens, beautifully laid out with raised flower-beds, and in the centre, a most tastefully designed conservatory. She he sought was there, bending down to train some rambling clematis shoots through wire trellis. Quick in sense and soul was Mabel; instantly she heard his step, and bounded gaily towards him, looking, in her simple white morning robe and muslin bonnet, the very embodiment of health and happiness, as bright and fresh as the morning itself.

“Good morning, dear Papa,” she exclaimed, and with sweet mingled love and reverence, pressed her lips to his hand, proffered her cheek to his salute.

“I see you have the forget-me-not;—you know, Pa, *why* I gathered *that* for you, this morning. You would guess that it was ‘for remembrance’ of me whilst you are away.”

“Then the half of them I will give you back, that the remembered may also remember.”

She took the offered flowers, with a glance to him, in which lay love’s own eloquence; she kissed them, and placed them in her bosom, with an air of charming girlish sentiment.

“I will show them to you, Papa, when you return to me, and now, I want you to walk

with me to the river side, and look at the water as it flashes and glitters under this loving sun ; the foam bells have all got rainbows in them, and the fish are leaping and jumping in such ecstasies, I do think playing and romping with each other rather than catching insects. Come, Papa, come, it is the most delectable morning, there is such chequered light and shade, such golden fretwork under the trees, as I never saw. Come, I must show it all to you ; and you must admire it as much as I do."

He smiled as he drew her arm within his, and said, " My little girl is quite in the poetic vein this morning, I find."

" Well, Papa, such loveliness is enough to inspire a stock or a stone ; a very pillar of dulness might break forth into singing, to say nothing of dancing, on the strength of it. How I do marvel at that Simon Stylites choosing to worship God on that dreary set up place of his, rather than on the green fresh earth."

Walk quietly, Mabel could not ; as they crossed park and plantation, she was skipping hither and thither, and frolicking about in the most ebullient joy, now linked with her father, anon chasing the water-fowl, which were scudding about the grass ; her laugh, pealing out so sweetly as she stooped to catch them,

and found them on the instant far away from her.

"Now, Papa!" said she, with her eyes fixed eagerly upon him as they stood at length by the river's brim.

"It is very lovely, I confess. I do not wonder that a romantic young lady like yourself found it inspiring," added he, gaily.

"Now, you are making a jest of me, because I am not in the least romantic, or I should prefer the pensive moonlight stroll, such as we had last night, to this glad morning scene, and I so much prefer this. Now, do look, Papa, at that rich crab blossom; I am sure it is blushing at its own beauty, as it sees itself in the water; and all the flowers are opening such bright eyes to sun and sky,—nay, the very willows are thinking much of themselves, as they dip their long tresses over and over again; and well they may be proud;—I should be, I know, if I were a bending willow, and had such a mirror."

Involuntarily as it were, his hand stroked her shining hair.

"Even those upright and downright pollarded trees don't look ugly, with this dear sun shining down upon them. How I do love sunshine! I wish we always had it; and hark to

the soft gurgling water, and the merry, merry birds ;—what music it is ! was there ever choral singing like it ? And see the bees ; already are the busy, thrifty creatures absolutely come, and working like slaves, preaching whole homilies to the lazy butterflies. Oh, Pa—dear Papa ! of all seasons, there can be none like spring, of all times of the day, none like the morning prime, for sweetness and for blythesomeness.”

There was almost woman’s softness in Mr. Somers’s eyes, as he watched her changeable, speaking countenance, whilst pouring out her blissful, joyous thoughts.

“This *penchant* of yours for the early morning is very natural, my love ;” tis the morning of life with you.”

“ And such a glad morning, too, Papa, such a ‘ shadowless picture ’ as I heard you say, one day, when speaking of something or some one or other ; with not one care or trouble—I might as well look for clouds in this peerless sky. After the dear God above, I owe this all to you—to you, my Pa. That was surely the cuckoo that flew across ?—Yes, there he is again.—What a funny, droll fellow you are, Mr. Cuckoo. Does not somebody call him ‘ a Wandering Voice,’ Pa dear ? ——”

“ I have brought you in a very high-flown

young lady, Anna," said Mr. Somers gaily to his sister, as he and Mabel made their entrance through the window into the breakfast-room. "She has been opening bright eyes with the flowers, dancing in the sunbeams, singing with the birds, working with the bees, scolding the butterflies, and composing Idyls upon everything; and I am inclined to think, feasting so upon divinest nectar and ambrosia, that she will be unable to eat any breakfast."

"Quite wrong, indeed, Papa. I am ravenously hungry."

"Draw to the table, then," said Mrs. Abney, "I was coming in search of you both. But what else have you been doing?" she smilingly asked, pointing to her flowers.

"Are they not pretty: Foster looked quite crabbed and covetous when he saw me cutting the cineraria blooms. Nay, I believe he actually trembled when I approached the auriculas, lest I should either gather, or mar the beauty of his velvet-cheeked pets. I believe he regards me as a sort of destroying —"

"Angel!" suggested Mr. Somers.

"Yes—angel. I was about to say, Ogre, but the other is far prettier."

"Have you been much on the grass, love? Are your shoes wet at all?" asked Mrs. Abney.

There came a little pout on the full red lips ; she felt almost too much cared for.

"The dew would scarce damp the butterfly's wing this morning, Auntie dear."

"Are you quite sure, Mabel? It would perhaps be better to change your shoes."

The red lips opened again, half to laugh, half to remonstrate, when she caught her father's eye quietly fixed on her.

Mabel instantly rose, and rang the bell for other shoes to be brought : she passed Mrs. Abney's chair in doing so, and stayed to give her a loving kiss upon the cheek. Again she met her father's eye ; the look of approbation it conveyed was priceless.

"Have you no commissions whatever for me to execute in town, Anna?—and you, Mabel ; can you think of nothing from shawl shops ; Hunt and Roskill's ; Howell and James's ; no orders for Madame Lefranc, even ?"

"I have been making out a list, Adrian ; and it has swelled into a goodly catalogue."

"And I have a list, too, Papa. Mine is quite ready. She leaned her face towards him, and whispered,—

"Books—Prints—Plants."

"Very good, my darling, I dare promise

you that I shall not forget. But is there nothing more—nothing from the Parks, Mabel?”

“No, Papa, nothing,” she replied, laughing, but colouring excessively. Mr. Somers also laughed, as did Mrs. Abney, till Mabel’s face, and neck, even her hands, were deepest crimson.

“Papa, Papa, I had not expected *that* from you. Indeed it is too bad.”

“You will give me permission to purchase, if I should hear of any on sale, Mabel?”

“You are only the very naughtiest of all papas,” she said, as she rose from her chair; and pressed her little white hand upon his lips. “Now, have done remembering that foolishness of mine. When am I to outgrow it? It is too teasing of you. I will give you this very sweetest kiss, not to speak of it any more.”

“Bribery, Mabel; you descend to bribery!”

“Yes; and you will take a bribe from me, I know.” She laid her head down upon his shoulder, and slid her arm round his neck; “there, your honour is pledged—a Somers never goes back from his word—to forget all about something very ridiculous, which I said when I was a little creature; not more

than nine or ten years old. I shall so soon be seventeen, that it is too long, quite too long to have it rising up in judgment against me now."

The jest against Mabel was, that on one of her visits to London with Mr. Somers, she had so coveted possession of some of the children in the Parks; and had seriously and gravely (as became one who had scarce ever had wish thwarted) requested him to purchase one or two of them, for her to take back with her to Somerton.

The joke was too good to be lost, or let drop, and the faintest allusion to it made her face burn.

Notwithstanding all her begging and beseeching, Mr. Somers would not absolutely promise that it should be laid up with the family archives, under lock and key.

"It *was* so very musty," she affirmed, "that it ought to take its place amongst them, and that without delay, and never come forth again."

In the course of the morning, Mr. Somers and his daughter walked into the village, which lay about half a mile distant from the hall. A pretty, wide-spreading, picturesque hamlet was Somerton; its white, tasteful cot-

tages gleaming pleasantly amid soft green pastures, and quaint, mossy old orchards.

Rich, fertile, quietly pastoral, was the aspect of the country round; gently sloping vales dipping down; as gently swelling hills rising up. Hill and valley charmingly diversified by fine ancient woods; and belts of majestic timber crowning and studding them.

A time-honoured name was that of Somers of Somerton. For one generation after another had the same family in one unbroken line of descent lived on the fine estate; the rental of which, at the lowest computation, did not fall below seven thousand a-year.

In beautiful order and keeping was the village, not alone its fine old church, its schools, its public play-ground, its excellent library of books; but its cottage homes, where its people grew up, where they lived and died, were of such admirable arrangement, not alone for decency, but for positive comfort. No squalid abodes, where miserable want and pining sickness confronted each other, were *there* to be found; no dark, damp, noisome tenements from whence gaunt wretchedness might stalk abroad in sullen discontent to its daily toil; or cower down supine, torpid, numb, to go through the phases of wasting sickness, or

racking rheumatism, or fiery fever — which, with air, and light, and cleanliness had never come — whilst the wretched sufferer was with pious mockery, bidden to resign himself to the will of God, *Whose chastisement it was.*

No such herding places for corruption of mind and body, such hotbeds for moral and physical ill, existed in Somerton; the welfare of his people was a matter of constant consideration for him, the just and generous owner of the soil. For the sick, there was the infirmary, a substantial brick building, apart from the village, where the poor in all serious illness could be at once conveyed, and freely receive all those comforts and appliances which their own homes could not supply; and where a first-rate nurse, Mrs. Lydia Dawkins, commonly known as Liddy, whom the Doctor had transplanted from one of the London hospitals, and whom, when he was in good temper, he jocularly called “his right-hand,” had the management of everything. A most excellent nurse was Liddy; shrewd, sharp, quick to perceive, and not *too* feeling: only one little drawback was there—that of talking too fast. Get her upon the subject of her hospital experience, and she knew not where to stop; one regalement of horror followed another, till the effect was

popularly described as making the flesh creep upon the bones, the hair stand on end.

“ I wish, Mrs. Dawkins,” said the Doctor, one day, “ that you would be more taciturn.”

With a reverential curtsy did she receive the expressed wish, and said, “ that she would do her best to please him in that as in all other things.”

Looking well satisfied he departed, leaving Liddy utterly perplexed by what he had said, —“ What could he mean by being ‘ more taciturn?’—what *could* he mean?”

In a large ancient house, whose hard outlines were pleasantly broken to the eye by quaint turret chimnies, odd-looking gables, and immense stone mullioned bay-windows—rooms almost in themselves—did the Doctor reside. Large and imposing, yet was it almost buried in the masses of ivy and traveller’s joy, and all kinds of old-fashioned climbing plants, clustering densely about its whole exterior. A broad walk, bordered with laurels, wild again from overgrowth, led up to the entrance. The Moat—so was the handsome picturesque old place called—had in its palmy days been altogether moated round, and was still partially so. It stood quite away from the village,

looked down with a grave, and almost solemn aspect upon the Somerton woods and groves.

"Ah! is that you, Miss Mabel, discovering me in my den,[?] morning toilette, *en papillotes*, and all the rest of it; well, never mind, you are most welcome, and just in time, for I can show you something curious, very curious, indeed; the blood circulating in a bat's wing. Do find some chairs, pray!"

So the Doctor greeted them as they entered his study, where they found him busy with his microscope, and looking particularly dreamy and abstracted.

"I dare say you have never seen it in a frog's foot, have you, eh?" he asked, gazing at her from under his glasses.

"No, I have not."

"Then you shall see it in both," he said, and rang the bell, which his housekeeper answered in person.

"Mrs. Whittaker, will you go to the moat and search about till you find a nice young frog, the younger the better, you understand, eh? and bring a spider or two, if you can lay hands on them, and a bee if you can catch one (you shall see his sting, Miss Mabel, and his little brushes for clearing his legs,) and bring anything else that comes in your way; and be

quick, Mrs. Whittaker ; take one of the maids with you to help in the catching."

Evidently well accustomed to such errands, Mrs. Whittaker smiled a very understanding sort of smile, and departed to fulfil her commission.

"I've been kept in all the morning with one thing and another ; but more particularly with this bat, which Ralph Hoskins captured last night, and made me a present of ; is he not a glossy, handsome fellow ?" inquired the Doctor as he gently stroked and petted it, with a beaming look of interest and scientific love.

"He is indeed a fine specimen," replied Mr. Somers.

"And so little ruffled, you see ; Ralph cleverly got him under his hat, so he was not knocked about at all. I have another captive under that glass ; a sort of Bombylius, which I was pleased to get hold of."

"I suppose you commission the village children to look out for unusual insects for you ?"

"Oh yes. I've quite a little regiment of scouts ; they are almost as eager in their *espionnage* as I am myself ; great is the shout of triumph raised when they meet with an unusual caterpillar or butterfly, or beetle ; to

be sure I am obliged to fee the young rascals well, for some of the strange-looking creatures, beasts, they call them, they do not, save for the hope of reward, care to touch. That is an Egyptian Locust, which was seized close to the Crowhurst last year; what the silly fellow was doing there, I am puzzled to conjecture. Pray do not look round my study, Miss Mabel, or you will see enough evidence of my sorrowful condition of celibacy—it's very miserable and very unnatural; I consider a wife to be the first necessary of life for a civilized man, as soon as he can find bread-and-butter for her."

"Is he not shockingly inconsistent, Papa?" said Mabel, laughing merrily.

Mr. Somers turned an amused look upon the Doctor, whose face mantled a little under it, and whose eye showed a visible touch of embarrassment; but he quickly rallied, and said briskly, as he continued caressing and petting the bat,—

"What can a poor man do that has no time for anything—whose day is scarce long enough to get through the ordinary transactions of life—what *can* he do?"

"Make time, Doctor," replied Mabel.

"Easily said—easily said, ay, and easily done, if I could go wooing in Petruchio fashion:

but I cannot disguise from myself that I am not the kind of man to wed a Kate, and tame a Kate, and make her conformable like other household Kates."

"He's afraid of meeting with a Queen Vashti, who would not come when she was called; see, Papa!"

"You are mistaken, Miss Mabel, I have a great respect for Queen Vashti; she upheld her woman's dignity very properly, I consider. No—no, I should never desire to be mated with a Patient Grissel. I am but a lukewarm admirer of Griselda; she would have done far better, in my humble opinion, to have scratched her princely husband's face, than submitted to all his whimsies in the saintly fashion which she did; and, indeed, if she had throttled him, it would have been but meet punishment for his scandalous treatment of her: but, heigh-ho, where am I going to?"

"You were speaking of your own wooing," said Mabel, with an arch glance.

"To be sure I was, when first Queen Vashti, and then Griselda led me astray. I do indeed wish I could find time to marry, but it could scarcely be supposed that any lady one would feel pride and pleasure in possessing, would do a man the honour to

accept his hand at a week's notice, and I could by no means dance about her for longer, wasting the precious hours."

"Do you remember the amusing account of Sir Isaac Newton's courtship, Merridan?" inquired Mr. Somers.

"Perfectly, and I am afraid mine would be something like it; if it were long about I know I should get dreaming, and oblivious of the lady's presence. But still I feel assured that I shall do but little good till I wed; I need a wife to advise me, to love me, and to help me. I could trust her, for instance, in this study of mine, where I never let servants come to put to rights, without fear and trembling. She could dust it for me without leaving all my books in disorder, or losing my papers, or upsetting the standish, or breaking the busts: look at those poor gentlemen on the brackets, they have not a nose amongst them; she could mend my pens, look out references, copy manuscript, write from my dictation,—in short, she could attend to everything for me."

"Which an amanuensis would suffice for equally well," said Mabel, with a little indignant toss.

"You must scarcely select a literary wife, Merridan, if she is to be made little more

than a human copying-machine," observed Mr. Somers, smiling at the description of the conjugal duties Mrs. Luke Merridan would be called upon to perform.

"Oh, I would find her plenty of other matters to see to; the little things I have mentioned would serve for recreations and amusements."

"Something the same end as the garnish on the dishes, or the dessert after dinner."

"Exactly; but here comes Mrs. Whittaker. Well done, well done, my worthy housekeeper," he exclaimed, enthusiastically, as Mrs. Whittaker uncovered a china bowl, and displayed to view a medley collection of creeping, crawling, leaping, jumping, flying insect life, over which the Doctor fairly gloated. "She was fit to be purveyor to the Queen," he said.

"Now, Miss Mabel, for your first view of marvels and wonders; where do you suppose the snail carries his eyes?"

"In his head."

"Nothing of the kind; in his horns; look at them.——"

When Mr. Somers and his daughter were returning to the Hall after leaving the Moat, they met a labouring man of the name of Collins, who, with a slow and weary-seeming

step, was wending his way home after his day's toil. Mr. Somers stopped.

"I have been wishing to see you, Collins. I have thought you not looking well, when I have seen you at church. Is anything the matter?"

"You are very kind, Sir; I have not been feeling well for a long time—in a going down sort of way. I've no heart or spirit to work, and I've a bad cough, which almost shakes me to pieces, and my meat does not seem to do me any good."

"You have consulted the Doctor, of course?"

"Oh yes, Sir. I have been taking medicine for some time from him. Very kind indeed he has been to me."

"You, perhaps, need better support. You have a large family to feed, and you work hard, may be too hard for your strength?"

"I cannot work hard now, Sir. The power and the desire of it seem to be quite gone from me. Mr. Gretton is very good, he has not dropped my wages yet, though I'm sure I can't do a fair day's work for them."

"Well, John, I will myself speak to Gretton about you. You shall receive your weekly sum as usual; but drop work altogether for a little time. You shall try a month in that way;

nurse yourself well, and think of nothing but *how* to get well. Send to the Hall for some wine, and Mrs. Abney will order you a regular supply of jelly. As one of the steadiest and most trusty labourers on my estate, I cannot have you laid up, if nursing and good living will bring back your strength."

"Thank you, Sir, but Mr. Gretton is very strict."

"I know he is; there is no good to be done without strictness and punctuality; but in this case I take the matter out of his charge into my own."

The big tears rushed into the man's eyes as he thanked Mr. Somers in homely but grateful phrase. Yet was there more for him to say; something he had not yet touched upon but wished to speak of, and knew not how to set about it. But it must come. Troubled and piteous was the look with which he told of his bad nights, of the harassing cough which wouldn't let him sleep, and how, when that quieted, he couldn't rest for thinking of what was to become of his wife and children—he had seven of them—if he should be quite laid up.

"I see nothing but the parish before them, Sir; and it is a hard thought to bear up against. I have never yet, nor my people

before me, troubled the parish for a penny. But I believe I shall be driven to it now."

"Keep up your spirits, Collins, and do not let your mind be troubled about your children; both they and you shall be well cared for. Now go home, and make yourself comfortable."

Eager and anxious was the man's gaze upon Mr. Somers' face, as he spoke. What he read there wholly reassured him; again were the unusual tears falling; he hastily brushed them away with the back of his toil-hardened hand, and apologized for them as being womanish—"But he was so very weak, he couldn't well help crying at hearing such comforting words; he hoped Mr. Somers would excuse it?"

As they passed on, Mabel said, "He looks very ill, Papa."

"He does. To me, he wears the appearance of one who will never be better. I must ask the Doctor about him. The whole family have always been well-conducted. John himself I have a great respect for, as a very striving, industrious man, and now that he is ill he must want for nothing."

None knew better than Mr. Somers the high privileges which property affords; none felt a keener sense of the weighty responsibility attaching to it. Faithfully did he seek to acquit

himself; not that by so doing he might stand well with his fellow-men—his calm, earnest tone of mind, rendering him indifferent to the swaying of the popular breath—but that he might feel the inward peace which right-doing never fails to yield.

This main-spring of action kept him at one with himself—in harmony—no discordant notes; this, pervaded all the teachings daily impressed upon his daughter, who was, as it were, sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, learning wisdom, and knowing it not.

Scarcely was there as much lively, pleasant conversation, with our party at the dinner-table, as there customarily was. Mrs. Abney was somewhat lengthy in impressing upon her niece the necessity of paying great attention to health during her stay at Beechwood; more particularly in the matter of changing shoes after walking on damp grass. And Mabel smiled, and promised the greatest care—with a look upon her face which said, “Though I promise, yet it is not possible *I* can be ill.”

“I think my discretion may surely serve me for a week, Auntie dear; especially as you and the Doctor are both coming to see me during the time. Only to think, that it is the first time I have ever spent a week from home,

without you or Papa! What an event it is! You will of course fetch me back, your own self, Pa, when you return from town?"

"I will, my love. You may expect to see me by the third of May, at latest. I shall be glad to get back, and have my light-hearted Mabel beside me again. But I expect you will quite lose your heart to your cousins, of both generations. Charles and Lillas are great favourites of mine; and the children—but I will leave you to speak of the children, Mab."

"Oh, I am quite ready to do that, for I never saw such caressing, lovesome little things—and so pretty. Did *you* ever see such sweet, curled darlings, Papa?"

"Hum—yes, perhaps, in the ——"

"Hush! not another word. It is scandalous that, twice in one day, you begin to talk about that. Now do—do, Pa, let the waters of oblivion pass over it; let it be buried deeper far than plummet or line ever fathomed!"

"So deep that it can never rise up again to make your face burn at the remembrance of your proposition to buy—to make merchandise of—Christian children."

"You will drive me into open rebellion; I know you will. Auntie, is he not too bad? Now, Pa dear—dearest, no more of it. Let

the stale jest be done with. Sow it with salt ; draw the plough over it. I will shut up my ears against your too aggravating words."

Gaily was she laughing, with her hands pressed down over her ears, when a footman announced that her carriage was waiting.

She retired to put on her bonnet and shawl ; and when she re-entered, held in her hand a cornucopia of gold fillagree, containing the forget-me-not, quite fresh and unwithered. Mr Somers glanced at it.

" *Must* I really take mine with me, Mabel?"

" Fie, Pa ; what a question to ask. Of course you will, and show it to me when you return ; as I shall show you mine."

Playful grew her look and smile.

" Have we not exchanged vows of love for each other, to last as long as we both shall live?—entered into covenant so that nothing *can* come between us? Ah, Pa, never shall I love anybody as I do you. I am sure of it. Nay, do not look incredulous, it gives me pain."

The smile died away, and her eyes filled with quick tears. Hastily he rose, and fondly kissed her, and in words and tones of the deepest tenderness soothed the wounded feeling into peace again.

"Well, Pa, I do not like partings," she said, after a while, "and that is the truth. And I do wish there were none. This must be the very last between you and I, Pa, for I have quite decided to go with you for the future—not be left as you are leaving me now. Remember, I am not a child, but old enough to be trusted; and also be a companion to you, Papa."

"*That* you have been, my child, for the last sixteen years of my life."

"Yes; but now I must be, mean to be, more so than ever; so that you will feel that I am wholly indispensable to you—not to be done without. What do you think of this lofty ambition of mine? I believe you are going to laugh."

"I am not, indeed, Mabel. I feel much more inclined to weep."

"Nay, not in my presence."

She clasped her arms round his neck, and leaned her cheek to his with loving pressure.

"Now, Pa, if we *must* part—remember, 'tis for the very last time—you shall kiss me, and say 'Good-bye,' before we go out."

She knelt down beside his chair, and with her soft hand held his, pressing it to her heart, her cheek, her lip, raining kisses on it.

"I much fear that I shall never get out of my childish habit of kissing you so much, Pa. Is it very childish and babyish?"

"It is very delightful to me, my Mabel."

"Well, you must tell me when you think I get too old for it, and ought to assume the character of a dignified young lady. It would sit very ill upon me at first, I fear. Now, Auntie dear," she continued, embracing her affectionately, "you must take great care of yourself, and not quarrel too much with the Doctor, as neither Pa nor I will be at home to mediate between you."

"Are *you* to drive, Mabel?" inquired Mr. Somers, as he handed her into the carriage.

"Please, Pa. I always feel so very proud and consequential to manage the reins whilst you are sitting beside me."

Gaily did she chat as they drove along. The smile scarce left her face, as one subject after another elicited sprightly remarks from her.

The coachman rode Mr. Somers' horse to within a mile of Beechwood; and there, Mabel, who had been driving very slowly, drew up to let her father alight. Even then there were more and yet more affectionate words to be uttered, ere they bade farewell. They lingered

over it ; but it was at length spoken, and they parted.

Mabel turned her head to look ; she kissed her flowers to him—her hand. She turned again, and yet again. Mr. Somers was sitting motionless on his horse, watching the retreating carriage, the fine proportions of his noble form brought into clear outline by the bright rays of the declining sun, which fell full upon him.

Blessings were gushing from his lips—fond, fervent blessings, on her, his child, in whom his love was garnered up—his whole heart dwelt.

She heard them not, but went on her way, a smiling, rejoicing creature. To her very inmost heart did Life's and Love's glowing sunshine reach.

CHAPTER III.

“ For her the falling leaf
Touches no chord of grief,
No dark void in the rose’s bosom lies,
Not one triumphal tone,
One tone of hope is gone
From song or bloom beneath the sunny skies.”
Prayer for Life.

MABEL’S light elegant equipage had quickly been observed as it glanced through the trees of the broad beech avenue, which turned and wound from the public road up to the house. The little Ferrands had been impatiently watching all the live-long day for its appearance.

When the pair of white ponies drew up at the entrance, Mabel sprang out to receive the cordial welcome of Mr. and Mrs. Ferrand, who had been summoned into the hall by the children’s joyous cry of,—

“ Mabel is coming !—Mabel is coming !”

Children sprung to Mabel, and clung about her wherever they encountered her ; there was something in that sunny smile, and gay sweet voice of hers, which invariably attracted them

to her. She was, in truth, in her bright girlhood, as glad-hearted as themselves.

She pretended not to see the little Ferrands ; and said, inquiringly,—

“ Where can the children be, Lillas ; do they not mean to welcome their cousin Mabel ? ”

“ Can you not see us, Mabel ? We are here ; we are here. ”

“ Oh, are these *my* children—these *my* little precious ones, the jewels of the house ? How many kisses have you for me, Ethelle, and you, Maud ? Come, quick, quick, and give them to me. ”

And here, baby Frank Somers Ferrand, who had for some time been holding out little fat arms, was seized on bodily, and clasped to her, his sweet round face pressing hers, whilst he uttered a little cooing, dove-like sound, to show her, in baby fashion, how he loved her.

“ Never *were* such children, ” said Mabel, with a positive air, as she caressed them over again. “ I believe I shall steal them from you, Lillas, when I go away. I shall never be able to part from them, I know. ”

Commissioning the coachman with a few words to her father, and giving a pat of the arched neck to each of her pretty ponies,

she took her cousin Charles's arm, and passed into the house.

Manifold were the secrets confided to her listening ear that night; revelations of white baby-rabbits, the prettiest that ever were seen; a detailed grievance of a Persian pussie, who had been so uncivil as to hide her kits; a description of Peter, the tortoise, which Papa facetiously called "Peter the Hermit."

Gentle whisperings and merry laughs, and taps with little fingers, came early in the morning at Mabel's door, which was soon opened to admit Maud and Ethelle; and away all went into the grounds, where a bright sun was fast drying up the dews, and opening the flowers.

A merry chase had they after some garden lapwings; and then a morning call was made upon some tame squirrels, which inhabited a comfortable box on a sunny slope.

The breakfast-bell rang ere she had seen half the pets. With no little reluctance did the little merry sprites allow her to go into the house to obey the summons.

"We need scarcely ask after your health, Mabel, with such glowing cheeks to testify that you are well," said Lilius. "Where are my flowers, children?"

“ Oh, Mama, we quite forgot.”

“ But I am not the person to be forgotten, I assure you ; so set about your morning duty. I *cannot* breakfast without flowers beside me, Mabel. Gather for each one of us the choicest you can find, and bring them quickly.”

The fresh morning air bore into the room delicious fragrance from large baskets of double violets and mignonette, placed beneath the open windows ; and Liliás rose up from table to bend lovingly over them, and inhale their delightful scent. She petted birds and flowers ; over the latter she was most luxurious ; flowers and flower odours *must* encompass her in her pleasant home.

A gay, animated, prepossessing creature was Mrs. Charles Ferrand, with fine graceful figure, and frank, generous-looking face ; her large, laughing eyes were full of spirit, and possessed Eastern beauty of shape and brilliance ; full lips, of richest crimson, opened to show faultless teeth. She was quick in temper, you might be sure ; would be lazy sometimes, often wilful, but never insipid.

A little spoiled had she been as Liliás Earle, for she was very attractive, counted her lovers by the dozen, summed them up on her pretty taper fingers when she was in merry mood ;

and not in any way to be marvelled at was it, that when Charles Ferrand won her from them all to be his own particular property, he also should go on spoiling her somewhat. Though *he* unmistakeably guided the reins, yet did he hold them with such a light and skilful hand, that perhaps even Liliass herself did not know how truly and thoroughly she deferred to his judgment and wishes. Not a day older did Liliass look than on that she had been wedded, and yet eight years had since rolled by. Very sprightly and saucy was her general look and manner, and never was it more so than when chattering away with Charles, whom she sometimes did her very best to tease with gay laughing assumption of wifely independence.

“She was quite sure there was no Salique law in marriage,” would she tell him, with such a pursing up of her pretty mouth and ringing out laugh, that it was quite impossible to do other than laugh with her, or seal with a kiss the pouting lips which gave open utterance to such treasonable doctrine.

Very sensible and intelligent was Mr. Ferrand, which, with a little aptitude for a jest, and a dash of quiet humour about him, made his conversation more than usually pleasant and agreeable. He was a tolerably keen poli-

tician, like most other country gentlemen ; but, unlike the generality of them, belonged to the Liberal school. Fond was he of drawing vividly coloured pictures of what our country was slowly but surely progressing to : believing, and cleverly maintaining, that her golden days, far from being gone by, were yet to come. Often did Lillas quiz him for his enthusiasm, but always with the secret pride which a high-minded and intelligent woman *must* feel in the belief that her life's companion stands mentally above his fellows.

" I tell you what it is, Charles," she said, as, a silvery chime striking eleven, they rose from the breakfast-table, " you want to make this earth an epitome of heaven, and it can't be done."

" Nor was it ever intended, I am sure. But to descend to common existence. What are your arrangements for Mabel and yourself ? Have you any plan, or none, for the day ? Can I be of any service ?"

" What will you do, Mabel ?" asked Lillas. " Will you ridé, or drive, or walk ? At seven we expect dinner company ; but you shall dictate how the morning is to be spent."

Mabel thought, as it was left entirely to herself, she would go and gather wild-flowers

with the children ; she had promised them to do so.

“ So be it, then. Everybody must be happy in their own way and fashion. Mine is by no means to be found in pulling wild-flowers with and for exacting children, and getting scratched, stung, and altogether wearied in their service.”

Soon were Mabel and the two little girls bonneted, and on their way to Fern Lane, “ which was quite a treasure-house of flowers,” said little Maud, whose fat white poodle, “ Beauty,” was fastened to her waist by a blue ribbon, and carried his little mistress’s flower-basket in very pretty dainty fashion.

A gleeful trio were they as they pursued their walk ; crossing from side to side, climbing the high mossy banks, and pulling eagerly at the buds and bells ; now stopping to listen to the peewit’s cry, now to the lark’s blythe song. Quickly were the baskets filled. Ferns and brackens were just uncoiling from their long winter’s nap. The sheeny, glossy arum leaves were doing all in their power to hide their pretty spikes of dusky red ; nodding and trembling in the soft breeze, stood the pale flower, of all others fit for lady’s bower, the delicate wind-flower, with its crimson-

veined dark leaves, and starry, spiritual-looking blooms. There were king-cups in regal vesture of purple, gold-spotted : slender, graceful stellarias, and hyacinths of the bluest.

"They were blue as Maud's eyes," said the wise and sentimental Ethelle.

"The flower-king *must* keep court in that Fern Lane," exclaimed Mabel, as she threw herself on a sloping bank to rest, for the sun was very powerful, and just there the over-arching trees made delightful shade, and not only shade, but music, as the pranksome breezes got playing and whispering with the tender leaves. Close to them was a wild, overgrown dingle, through which ran a brawling brook, adding its pleasant murmur to the other pleasant sounds of birds, and bees, and calling lambs.

A good study for a painter was the party sitting on the bank. Maud, a most affectionate little creature, had her head resting on Mabel's shoulder, crushing her little pink bonnet quite flat in so doing ; her eyes were clear and liquid, with much of the tint of the blue space above, to which they were upturned ; the red lips were a little apart, showing somewhat of the pearly teeth within ; her

light, bright curls hung down to her plump little waist, and the pink-tipped fingers were seen, as her arm clasped Mabel round. The poodle was resting on her lap, half-buried in flowers which had fallen from the basket.

The child seemed spirited away into dream-land, so abstracted and fixed was her look upward.

But how are we to describe the face that with such earnest gaze is bending down towards Maud's? Lovely you know and feel on the instant that it is, with form, feature, colouring—stars in the firmament have not purer, brighter lustre than the eyes that had surely stolen their colour from the deep-blue violet, the long silken fringe that swept over them hiding yet enhancing their exquisite beauty. The rich, bloomy cheek; the mouth—could anything be prettier?—ever dimpling, breaking into sunny smiles, the laugh only a deeper smile, more radiant, fuller of joy; the eyebrow's perfect span; the rich hair, sufficiently dark to give effective contrast to the neck and brow of living snow;—these things you might not pass unobserved; but where or in what lay that haunting charm of look? A sweeter or more gracious one never beamed

upon a human countenance. You knew that it had less of earth in it than of heaven ; that it was born of beauty in the soul.

“ Sister Ann, sister Ann, do you see anybody coming ? ” exclaimed Mabel, as still reclining on the bank in most lazy fashion, the sound of Baby’s chariot-wheels reaches them ; and shortly after his baby equipage came into sight, drawn by a most solemn, pompous-looking goat, rejoicing in the name of Bluebeard. Baby’s round hat is quickly encircled with flowers and long ivy tendrils, and very gay, and sweet, and picturesque indeed he looks.

So all the young creatures wended their way home together, Master Frank Somers Ferrand nodding his little jaunty head to one and another, and looking all kinds of saucy things, though he could not speak any.

CHAPTER IV.

"I saw her daunce so comely,
Carol and sing so swetely—
Laugh, and play so womanly,
And looke so debonairely,
So goodly speke, and so friendly."

CHAUCER.

MR. FEBRAND persisted in saying that Liliás had not good taste in dress. Very wide eyes of astonishment did she open on first hearing him broach the opinion, that, whenever she wished to look particularly well, she must refer to his judgment, not her own, as to colour and arrangement.

At this unlooked-for arrogance, Liliás, with the least possible inclination in the world to pout, laughed, and said the fault could not possibly lie in herself,—it must rest with her *modiste*; but, be that as it might, she had no objection whatever to consulting him about her toilette; but she should reserve to herself the right of acting contrariwise to his taste, whenever she thought well; that she was not, she believed, in a state of vassalage; that she

had her own wifely will, like all other wives. To all of which Charles, of course, smilingly assented.

Most becomingly attired did she look when she met her guests in the drawing-room before dinner; her finely-proportioned figure was set off by the richest violet velvet dress, which was draped upon the bosom, and drawn low in the centre with a spray of pearl and diamonds. The sleeves hung wide, and were fastened up with pear-shaped pearls to correspond; a little costly Alençon lace at the edge of sleeve and bosom alone took away from the studied plainness of her costume. Even Charles's scrutiny failed to detect a fault; and she turned to her mirror, after undergoing it, with a look of pleasure, almost triumph, on her spirited face.

"The best and most dutiful of wives," said she, *sotto voce*, "*the very best*, to take such pains to please her husband in her dress."

With girlish simplicity was Mabel attired, in transparent white muslin in the tunic form, the upper skirt looped up with blue ribbons, and a blue sash encircling her rounded waist; her bright hair wreathed in soft wavy *bandeaux*, and fastened in a Grecian knot at the back of her graceful head. Very elegant was her ap-

pearance, and full of sparkling youth, and life, and gaiety.

Mr. Ferrand encountered her at the door as she was entering the drawing-room, and thought, as he drew her arm within his own, that never had he seen such a radiant young creature. Almost did it come upon him as a surprise; for though, from the near relationship, and from the vicinity of the two houses, they saw much of each other, yet till now had Mabel seemed a child; and, being her father's one idolized darling, scarce trusted out of his sight, her visits had hitherto been brief, never exceeding a day.

A very cheerful, pleasant house was Beechwood, and very social were Charles and Lillas; seldom did they dine without guests at the board; and their larger dinner gatherings were by no means the dull, pompous, ponderous affairs they are so commonly found in the country; neither too large in number, nor yet made up of incongruous materials; but those were brought together who seemed likely to amalgamate, not *suffer* each other for so many hours. Agreeable *re-unions* were their dinners, in fact,—not tedious meetings of creditors. A general favourite was Lillas in the neighbourhood; she was so piquant and so

lively ; always found something to talk about to the dullest person ; exercised nice womanly tact in her choice of subjects ; and gave herself no airs.

After the guests had departed, Mabel, who was in the gayest spirits, insisted upon her cousin Charles waltzing with her,—like all other joyous young creatures did she love quick movement. So off they started in the giddy dance, her light feet seeming scarcely to touch the floor, as the two twirled round and round together.

“More—more !” she kept exclaiming to Liliás, who was playing merrily to them ; whilst her vivid colour and radiant eyes betokened how much she enjoyed the impromptu dance.

“Oh, Cousin, you are a most charming waltzer,” she said, as at length, panting and breathless, she threw herself into a chair. “I am quite sure you *must* have won Liliás’s heart when you danced together.”

“He did, Mabel,” said Liliás, laughing ; “at least it was in the dance that he first began to whisper soft nothings to me.”

“Which she with greedy ear devoured.”

“Nonsense, Charles ; you know you *beguiled* me into matrimony. He woo’d me in

season, and out of season. Always was he insinuating how pleasant my life would be if passed with him, till I was glamoured, bewitched. He was like the serpent at the ear of Eve, with his fleecing and flattering, till I, who meant to regard him only as the handsomest and most agreeable partner I had in the dance, was obliged to accept him altogether, promising to take a life interest in him. It was a most vexatious occurrence; but, candidly, he left me no freewill at all, Mabel."

"I am sure I deserved the public thanks of the community, for converting the greatest flirt in Berkshire into a tolerably quiet, composed young matron. I undertook the brave task of correcting her insolence, and bringing her into subjection; for the way she was conducting herself was monstrous; mowing down hearts, and trampling them underfoot with as little compunction as though they had been noxious nettles, or thistles. Tell Mabel how many offers you refused, Liliás."

"I cannot exactly, just now. Some day I will count them up for the purpose. Very tiresome things are proposals of marriage,—the formality of them, and the fuss. Though it *is* curious to see decided, strong-willed men

hanging upon your smile, and watch them grow pale or red with emotion, or tremble at a mere chance touch of your hand ; whilst you yourself are wholly shut, barred, locked to it all ; feel that from *them*, looks, and words, and tones of most passionate appeal may never move you, or disturb your serenity in the least. It *is* curious—very. Now shall I play again, *ma-belle*, or have you had enough waltzing ? ”

“ No, once again, please, before we say Good-night.”

The house, in the course of a day or two, was in a complete uproar ; Mary and Susan Earle, two younger sisters of Liliás, joined the party, and the veriest madcaps possible were they,—scarcely moving, breathing, or looking, without either meditating or perpetrating mischief. Order disappeared at the sound of their footsteps ; decorum flew away when their laugh rang out. Mr. Ferrand occasionally looked grave at the pranks and outrageous play going on ; but Liliás enjoyed it all excessively, entering into it with wonderful relish and sympathy ; whilst the children were wild with enjoyment and fun.

The week was speeding on ; Mabel heard from, and wrote to, her father daily. The

Doctor and Mrs. Abney had both driven over to see her. Curious was it to listen to her chat with them, it was so interspersed with anecdotes of "those darling children," as she called them. The last day of April had come, and a busy day it was. There were so many flowers to be gathered—wild flowers, of course—for garlands for the May-day festival. Then at night, Mabel sang the "Queen of the May" to the children, who were delighted with the music-breathing song, and must have it repeated again and again.

"*It is* a very pretty song, cousin," quoth the wise little Ethelle; "that is so very pretty about 'the night-winds, and the happy stars.' Is it a true song, Mabel?"

"Give us that song once more, Mabel—the whole of it—the adagio as well as the allegro. Why did you not sing the whole to the children?" inquired Mr. Ferrand.

"I thought it might sadden them. The idea of death is frightful to children—is it not?"

"I don't know; there are none, perhaps, who think it a very agreeable subject of contemplation. But give us the song."

A pure soprano was Mabel's voice, fine, and finely cultivated; rich and full its tone. Israfil himself, the angel of song, must have

touched it with sweetness. Remarkable in her singing was the perfect effortless articulation ; not a word was missed by the ear.

“ Thanks to you ! now come and sit on this couch beside me ; I want to have some chat with you. But we must first send those two giddy-brained girls away, who are never silent, even for variety’s sake. Miss Susan and Miss Mary Earle, will you oblige us by—— ?”

But they had heard what he said ; and did not wait for further enlightenment as to his wishes, but, with a great laugh, bounded through the open window ; and, in the course of a minute or two, were seen chasing each other at full speed round a magnificent Deodara growing on the lawn.

“ I *must* make a particular examination of your genealogical tree, Lillas, and learn where you and your sisters get this wild untameable blood from,” said Charles.

“ Now, my young cousin, I wish to talk to you about your idea of keeping children in ignorance of death ; why would you do so ? They *must* know it.”

“ Yes ; but whilst they are so young, *can* they understand that there is a necessity for death—that it is often a prayed-for, coveted blessing ?”

The miniature Mabel drew from her bosom was that of a gay, almost laughing girl, of eighteen. The eyes were clear, sparkling grey; very soft and sweet-looking, yet so arch, as they glanced up through long, dark lashes. A fair, open brow—perhaps not quite as expressive of high, serene thought, as her child's, but in perfect keeping with the eloquent eyes, which discoursed all pleasant things. The mouth had the same full, beautiful curves as Mabel's, and seemed just breaking into a smile, which would have witchery in it. Very lovely and winning was the face—that of one whom you might take to your heart and half worship.

“She must have been exquisitely pretty,” said Lillas; “this is even prettier than the full-length at Somerton.”

“Yes; and Papa says it is the more faithful likeness of the two.

““Oh, that these lips had language!””

said she, with a low, tremulous voice, as she kissed the miniature, and returned it to her bosom.

“I think you were scarce a year old when you lost your mother, Mabel?”

“About a year, I believe. I have not the very faintest remembrance of her; and, in-

deed, have never known what the loss was. Papa has been everything to me."

Here the room was suddenly darkened by the presence of two figures at the window, inquiring "if the secrets were all talked, and they might come in?"

"Come in—come in!" replied Mr. Ferrand. "I hope you two volatile beings have exhausted a little of your nervous energy."

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the laughing Mary. "We have stored it all for the purpose of teasing our rude brother Charles for his incivility in sending us out of the room."

He pulled her curls, and told her she wanted whipping.

"I must have more chat with you, Mabel, before you leave us," said Charles, as he bade her Good-night. "I foresee that you and Lillas and I, shall from henceforth be excellent friends."

"Indeed, I hope so," was the rejoinder.

"And I make you free of my library, which is more than I would do with many of the fairer, gentler—what shall I say—more garrulous sex. You shall come and sit with me sometimes, my pretty coz, and tell me more of these young old thoughts of yours, and we will look into them a little, and sift them."

The night was over and gone; and when the "morn unbarr'd her golden gate," it dawned just as May morning should—fair, and warm, and bright. May-dew was beading the grass with fairies diamonds, which, alas! will never stay for ignoble use, but straightway disappear when the broad sunlight flashes on them. The vivacious children were early astir, busied with garland-making. Four magnificent garlands were to be suspended in Liliás's own garden, a beautifully laid-out space of ground, entirely hedged round with azaleas and rhododendrons, now in the zenith of their bloom, and perfectly gorgeous in effect. Four entrances had it, each an archway, bowered over with brightest flowers. In this sweet spot, so well adapted for sport and play, were tea-tables spread for a goodly company. It was a kindly custom at Beechwood to invite to tea, on May-day afternoon, the pupils and governess of the village-school. The guests of Maud and Ethelle were they considered to be; and something remarkable was the bustle and importance of the two little girls on so notable an occasion.

After they had taken tea, Mabel, as much interested as the children, proceeded to join the party, and constitute herself the presiding

deity of the gay and animated scene. Quickly was she found sitting by the side of Margaret Fisher, the lame governess, whose gentle, but almost sad-looking countenance had instantly caught her eye. Soon did she find out that, veiled by a shy manner, Margaret possessed an intelligent, and somewhat cultivated mind ; and she sent Ethelle for some numbers of the " Art-Journal " for her to look over, as her unfortunate lameness made exertion painful to her. Pleasant was it to see the keen interest which lit up the poor girl's face, as she examined the beautiful prints. Her remarks evinced so much taste for drawing, that Mabel was induced to question her ; and with fine womanly tact, without in the least seeming to push inquiries, did she induce her to confess that she was a self-taught artist.

Her face grew painfully suffused, as she said, " she could draw a little ; she could copy any flower that she plucked, but she had been wholly without instruction, and she knew her drawings were full of faults. She was glad to do anything to occupy her time when her pupils were gone, as her lameness wholly prevented her moving about. Indeed, she had no desire left for active employment ;—some book

to read, or light work to do, as she sat still, was all she cared about now."

A little sympathising questioning, and it was quietly told what hours of suffering had to be undergone with the lame knee; suffering not to be mitigated by aught save laudandum;—very thankful was she to have *that* to fly to when the pain was more than flesh and blood *could* bear. Scarce did she know what sound sleep was; she often sat by her chamber-window from midnight almost till day-dawn, unable either to slumber or lie down.

Sudden interest sprang up in Mabel's heart for the pale, subdued-looking creature, whose heritage seemed that of such deep bodily suffering; and she said, with gentle voice and glance,—

"I must ask our own kind physician to call upon you, and examine your knee; he is very skilful, and rejoices to do good."

Margaret thanked her, but said she no longer allowed herself to hope for any amendment. "She believed she was past all earthly cure."

Meekly she spoke; but starting tears came.

The scene wore its gayest aspect; for Mabel had sent for Lilius's harp, that she might set

the children dancing, when Mr. and Mrs. Ferrand made their appearance on the lawn. Quite struck were they by the bright animation of the scene, and the picture-like grouping of the party; the picturesque dancers; the separate knots of little merry-makers scattered about the shrubs and flower-beds; the blythe looks of the two little queens of the *fête*, busy dispensing smiles and graciousness to all around; Mabel was standing with her harp half hidden under the shady canopy of a great broad cedar-tree, on whose dark straight foliage the rich sunlight fell with finest effect, and warmly kissed the green turf underneath, as the dense branches rocked under the power of the sweet, laughing breeze flying abroad.

“What a downright pretty *tableau*!” said Lilius to Charles, as they passed amid the groups to make their way to Margaret Fisher, and give her friendly greetings, as she sat beside Mabel, even *her* habitually sad countenance lighted up with a cheerful smile.

All too soon did the red sunset-rays shoot down, and tell that the happiest hours and the merriest evenings the most quickly pass; but the happy party did not disperse till Mabel had, at Charles’s request, sang to them.

A murmur of delight and admiration broke from the children, and one or two daring ones said,—

“Oh! if she would *but* sing again!”

Without an instant's hesitation, she turned to the harp; and again her rich voice rose in gay and gleeful song,—frolic it was. With clapping hands did they testify their great delight, and her face glowed with pleasure. As the veriest child amongst them had she enjoyed the evening; though by-and-by she confessed to a sort of Tantalus feeling upon her, in having been compelled to stand still while others were dancing. Appealingly she glanced at Charles as she spoke, who laughed, and held out his hand to her for a fly-away galop on the grass.

Lilias struck the harp, and played a lively waltz; whereupon Charles and Mabel, the two madcap sisters, and the little Ethelle and Maud, simultaneously whirled off together, with rapidest movement, and in the wildest spirits.

And the sunset glow departed, and the moon climbed up the sky, to shower down silvery light on the merry dancers, whose twinkling feet seemed tireless; whose joyous, sparkling laughter made the garden alleys

ring again. They did at length come to a standstill. Charles declared that he, the responsible head of a household, and venerable father of a family, *would* dance no more mad dances by moonlight with giddy girls of seventeen, let come what would. Whilst Mabel, still laughing with the gayest enjoyment and *abandon*, affirmed that they had taken their pleasure right pleasantly.

As they leisurely strolled in, she began to ask Liliás about the poor lame governess.

"She is a very superior young woman," said Liliás. "Poor thing! she has had a great deal to go through. I will give you her history to-morrow, if you will remind me."

"I thought she must have a history,—she looks so sad, and her eyes fill with tears so readily. Don't you think it probable that something more might be done to relieve her lameness?"

"I dare say it might if she had skilled advice. I have often thought of speaking to her about it; but I have so many things to remember, that it has always passed from my mind again."

"Make a note of it, Lily," said Charles quietly, almost gravely, "and if anything can be done, set about it at once."

"She draws a little, she tells me," continued Mabel, whose quick eye saw a pained, vexed look flitting over Liliás's face; "I think I should like to call before I leave Beechwood, and glance over her productions."

"I did not know that she could draw," returned Liliás; "she must be quite self-taught, for I am sure she can afford no instruction; her mother lives with her, and depends on her for support, entirely."

During the chat which ensued after reaching the drawing-room, Mr. Ferrand said, in answer to an observation from Mabel, about her leaving them the following day but one,—

"We shall all be sorry to part with you, dear Mabel; all of us, from baby upwards; *proh dolor!* will be the cry from the infantry, I am sure. When may you be pleased to come and stay with us, again?"

"Indeed, that is more than I can tell you. We are going into Wales soon; Cousin Jane and Ellen Vallencey, and the delightful Colonel himself, go with us; so it will be a very enjoyable visit. Papa is the most charming companion in the world to travel with."

"Ah! we shall see all this ardent love for your father superseded some of these days, Mabel."

"You never will, Cousin. I have his image and superscription in my heart; and when I lose it, I must cease to be. Never shall I cease to love him as I do now."

Eagerly she spoke, flushing over cheek and brow, in her haste to deny and confute what Mr. Ferrand had almost laughingly said. Incredulous and quizzical grew his look as he rejoined,—

"There *is* such a thing as re-writing *mabelle*. We see and hear of it every day. You know 'Constancy has fled to the realms above,' as an old-fashioned virtue, not suited to these stirring times."

The soft, starry eyes turned on him, but no longer soft; they were flashing forth living fire.

"Do not jest with me upon *that* subject, Cousin," she exclaimed with an agitated and indignant voice; "it is too sacred. My affection for my father is a part of my very being. —He has given *me* life, I can give *him* love; and do, and ever shall," she continued, impetuously.

"Now, Charles, do not tease Mabel any more," exclaimed Lillas. "It is nothing but the arrogant conceit of the sex, which leads them to suppose, Mabel, that when they inspire liking, there must needs be an obliteration of

every previous sentiment or affection, of a woman's nature. I believe that even the wise and sensible men—if any such there be—fall into the error for error ; it is, I am quite sure.”

“Not at all—not at all. We lords of the creation invariably find when we make successful approaches, that we have a *tabula rasa* to write on ; each man becomes a legislator, a king, a kaiser ; he remoulds, recoins, stamps whatsoever impression pleases him best.”

All laughed at the cool effrontery of the speech, and the air *nonchalant* with which it was uttered.

“There, I am satisfied, now that I see you laugh again, Mabel. I could scarce have deemed it possible that your eyes *could* send out such angry light, or that you were so warm tempered. It is really extraordinary that one never *can* meet with a thoroughly amiable woman : once or twice in a life-time, perhaps, we may rashly cry out, that we *have* found her ; but no such thing, as we duly learn, when we have waited a sufficient season. One reads of such beings, but for my own part I am inclined to think that the accounts are wholly mythical and fabulous ; that amiable women, strictly so called, either never did exist, or have become utterly extinct.”

Again did Charles Ferrand look, with an exceeding composed and comfortable air, upon the laughers around him.

“Lilias declared that she did not know who these amiable women, strictly so called—something like distilled honey of Hymettus they must be—could find to mate with, if they were forthcoming.

There was giddy whispering between the two young sisters, and something was indistinctly heard, about “placing pearls before swine.”

CHAPTER V.

“Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north-wind’s breath,
And stars to set—but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death.”

MRS. HEMANS.

CHANGED, indeed, was the aspect everything wore the next morning. ’Twas no longer flowery, bowery May, but November-like gloom, and down-pouring rain from grey, ragged-looking clouds spread over the face of the sky: from north to south they were driven rapidly along by a rough, vexed-sounding, gusty wind, which rose up every now and then, chafing at inaction, and beat the rain furiously against the windows, roared to the trees in a voice of thunder, and compelled them to do fit homage to its might by bending and bowing themselves, whilst in playful, tyrannous derision, it snapped off their leaves and branches.

“Do order heaped-up fires in the grates, Lillas,” said Mr. Ferrand, with a shuddering glance at the windows, when the party gathered at the breakfast table; “whoever would have

dreamed of yesterday being followed by such a day as this? What shall you young ladies do with yourselves to kill the time?"

"A sofa, and the last new novel," suggested Mary Earle. "Battledore and shuttlecock, or billiards," ejaculated her sister Susan.

"What do you say to acting charades, or getting up *Tableaux Vivants*?" asked Mabel.

"The very thing—the very thing," was felt and said by all.

Lilias generously proffered the use of the dining-room for a theatre; and said, with a droll look at her husband, that they would, as a matter of convenience, just for one day, practise abstinence, and go without any dinner; to which proposition, of course, Charles demurred. As he did not take luncheon, he was not willing to forego dinner; but not to be outdone in generosity, he placed his wardrobe at the service of the lady performers, who, with very abundant mirth, frankly accepted it.

"We shall need everybody's assistance," said Mabel. "Please, Lilias, order Bluebeard and Beauty a good washing, that they may be presentable in the cast; we shall be certain to want them. And dear Baby must take a character. Wouldn't the sweet little round fellow make a beautiful page?"

After due consideration it was decided that baby was not to be depended upon, but that the little *fanfan* Maud might take the page's place.

Here a considerable interruption ensued, owing to a suggestion from Lillas, that one of them should enact the character of "*a thoroughly amiable woman*." But none were willing to sustain it; they should neither know what to do, nor what to say, in representation of the "faultless monster."

"Whom the world ne'er saw," added Lillas, with a fine, malicious sparkle in her beautiful eyes. The mirth grew into uproar, when she proposed that Charles himself should enact it, as the most fit and suitable person, and the only one amongst them who had any idea of the properties and endowments personal to the "*thoroughly amiable woman*."

So hearty and unrestrained was the laughter, that Charles ran off to the library, vowing that he would have no more to do with either acting or actresses; he would not even come to rehearsal, nor yet to performance.

A couple of hours had, perhaps, passed by; sounds of most vivacious chat, accompanied now and then by pealing mirth, proceeded from the dining-room, where the frolic girls were

arranging the order of performance, and studying effective and picturesque costumes for their scenic display.

Lilias was with Charles in the library. A great preference had she for spending her mornings there : making or finding a plea for going in, in search of book or newspaper ; and when there, quietly establishing herself in the cosiest of study chairs and duly prepared position for indolent enjoyment.

"I am come to you as usual, Charles," she said on entering ; "this is quite the pleasantest room in the house on a rainy day."

"Or any other day when I am here, Lily, is it not !" he asked, coolly, without raising his eyes.

"Oh, fie—shocking ! What an arrogant, self-flattering husband you are."

"Certain to be, when my wife runs after me so continually."

"You might put it in a more gracious and agreeable form, I think. You are by no manner of means an extravagant fellow in honied words, in 'taffeta phrases and silken terms precise,' my spouse."

"No, love, I deal more in unvarnished truths, in 'russet Yeas, and honest kersey Noes.' But now, if you are really come to

stay, you must be quiet—not talk at all—for I am reading something that I wish to give my whole attention to.”

“‘To hear is to obey.’ I will forthwith enact the part of the *Silent Woman*.”

The little emphasis she gave drew a smile from him, but no further words, and Lilius took up a novel, and, with an obsequious air and voice, asked if she might be permitted to turn over the leaves.

“You may.”

So she settled herself down to her book, and soon became engrossed by it. But after a while her eyes were lifted, and head raised, in the attitude of one listening to some unusual sound.

“There are surely strange voices in the hall, and yet I have not heard the door-bell ring.”

“No one would dream of making calls on a day like this; ’tis only those giddy girls romping with the children,” answered Charles, looking the least bit in the world impatient of the interruption.

The words had scarce passed his lips, when there rang through the whole house a frightful cry—a cry syllabling no words—but wild, thrilling, forced out by sharpest agony of human woe.

“Merciful God! what is it?” ejaculated Liliás, white with fear; her heart felt dying within her, with terror for her children.

Mr. Ferrand started to his feet, and rushed into the hall; a group was standing round Mabel Somers, whom Dr. Merridan was supporting. Her face wore the hue of death; at her feet lay an open letter. She was not conscious; with the utterance of that great and exceeding bitter cry, she had fainted.

CHAPTER VI.

"In whose brave mynde, as in a golden coffer,
Most heavenly gifts and riches lockèd are."

SPENSER.

MR. SOMERS, having completed the business transactions which called him to Town somewhat sooner than he expected, returned to Somerton on the first day of May. Very pleased was he to find a welcoming note from his young daughter, sent on the possible chance that he might return a day sooner than the one specified.

"He would ride over to Beechwood early the following morning, and surprise the darling," he said; "she must return home quickly, for the house would be full of visitors by the end of the week; amongst them, Colonel Vallancey—Mr. Somers' brother-in-law—and his two daughters; he was sure Mabel would not like to be away when *they* came."

He went round the gardens with Mrs. Abney, and afterwards walked to the Moat to call upon the Doctor, whom he took back to the Hall to dine.

Not long did the two gentlemen sit over their wine, but adjourned to the drawing-room for coffee and after-dinner chat.

It was at all times a picture to watch the varying expression of Mr. Somers's face in conversation; as the smile came or went, the eye softened or brightened in unison with, and in illustration of, his subject. Of a very high order were his conversational powers; genial, abounding in imagery, yet full of most earnest intellectuality; teeming with thought, and clothed in such fit and flowing language, as few possess the gift of: never was he at a loss for a word, never did he use any but *the* word in laying open the rich and widely-varied stores of the "kingly mind which God him gave."

A table of pure Carystian marble stood at his elbow, heaped with books and fresh prints; he and the Doctor were looking them over, and discussing them.

"Books—prints—plants," had been his young daughter's commissions. *There* were the books and prints, and the plants he had himself seen arranged in her own greenhouse.

"How do you like the design of that clock, Merridan?" asked Mr. Somers, pointing to one in Parian and gold standing on a side-table.

The Doctor rose to examine it, before committing himself to an opinion on its merits. Faultless was the execution, beautiful the design; an airy, smiling young maiden, of faultless symmetry of form and feature, was proffering a flower-garland to a grave, sage-looking figure, habited in flowing robes, whose brow, crowned with thought, and whose calm, passionless face, directed towards her, and up-raised hand, invited *her* attention to the dial.

"It is the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life," said the Doctor, with a look of great admiration.

A gentle titter broke from Mrs. Abney.

"He has fallen into the trap, you see, Anna," said Mr. Somers, with a smile; "I thought, Luke, that even your phlegm and indifference to these things generally, would scarcely be proof against the very perfect grace and beauty of that design. To tell you the truth, I-brought it on purpose to tempt you; it shall be sent up to the Moat in the morning, and Mrs. Abney and I will call to see how it looks in the centre of your mantelpiece.

The gift was accepted in the same gracious spirit in which it was proffered.

"By the way, you must see the new horse I have bought for my little girl, and tell me

what you think of my judgment in horse-flesh. I hope the puss will be pleased with it,— I feel quite lost without her joyous presence. Home is scarce home without her—no disparagement to you, dear Anna,” he added, gaily, to Mrs. Abney—“ but Mabel is so cheery and so glad ; she’s like prisoned sunshine in the house.”

The dark Arabian was brought on the lawn to be exhibited ; stately he moved up and down, his step full of disdainful pride of the earth he trod on ; a beautiful, fine-limbed creature was he, with the small graceful head, erect delicate ear, expanded nostril, and brilliant, prominent eye, so desirable in a lady’s palfrey.

“ He’s a noble animal indeed. Not too fiery in temper, is he, for Miss Somers ? but I need not ask, you would not have purchased him for *her*, had he been other than quiet.”

“ I *would not*, Luke, you may be sure,” he said, with much emphasis. “ I am told that he has every good point and property which a lady’s horse should have, and a few over. Lady Clarence Fullerton has been riding him for the last twelve months. I encountered her ladyship in the Park, and frankly told her, as we stood chatting, that I should like to purchase

the horse on which she was mounted, if she was willing to part with him. She is about leaving England for a lengthened period, so we soon came to terms."

Whilst standing at the window, Mr. Somers remarked upon the extreme splendour of the sunset, which was flooding the landscape with most exquisite hues.

"Do, Anna, put aside your work—Arabesque, what is it?—and look at the sky; I do not know that I ever saw so singular an effect."

It *was* very singular. Long lines of soft, rosy, rippling clouds, crested with deep crimson foam, rose up from the western sky even to the zenith: calm vermeil waves resting on a blue aërial sea. But wonderfully gorgeous was the kindling up of tints and richest colours about the descending sun; into a resplendent hall of unimaginable vastness was he entering, an abode of glory for his evening rest; its porch and columns, its wall and gallery, its floor and roof, were all of gold, blent with imperial purple and vivid burning rose. Light, plume-like clouds—winged, airy messengers—were waiting round, attendants on their magnificent lord, as he sank into those glittering, shining depths.

"Southern Europe could scarcely show a

finer sunset, nor a rarer inweaving of colours," said Mr. Somers, with his gaze fixed upon it; "I hope Mab is looking at it; the child has a reverent eye for all such scenes."

"She will be too much occupied to notice it," said Mrs. Abney; "she told me when I saw her yesterday, that they were to have the village-school children to tea, and that she herself should be mistress of the ceremonies."

"Ah, yes, she mentions it in her note of this morning," replied Mr. Somers. "How supremely happy she is when she gets children with her, to be sure!" he added, as he took out her letter, and read portions of it aloud. "' We are going to play 'La Pastorale,' and make high festival for the children. Now what should you think of my becoming a veritable shepherdess with real crook, and following my flock about in—

"Gown made of the finest wool,
Which I from my pretty lambs should pull?"

In

"Cap of flowers, and a kirtle,
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle?"

"I must talk this proposition over with you when we meet, which will be soon, soon, my Pa. My last kiss to you was one of farewell; the next will be one of greeting and

sweetest welcome to the kindest, best, best-loved of all papas, from his own daughter, his darling, his *little* Mabel, (I underscore that word, because I know I am not little now,) who wants him with her always, to tell him every thought she thinks ; though scarce is there need, for have you not said that my mind was a book, of which you could read every page ? and so it will be always : this you know, my Pa . . .

“ ‘ You told me I should lose my heart to my cousins ; and so I have, though Cousin Charles is, in truth, a little of a teaze ; but yet I do like them both exceedingly. But *such* children they are,—such dancing, singing, lovesome darlings ! Little Maud—Golden-Locks, I call her—I do actually covet. Could you, think you, *beg* her for me, to live with us ? *There* is sublime daring ! I shall vanquish you soon with your own weapons, and when you laugh, laugh also, you see, Papa.

“ ‘ Do you know, these little creatures are besieging and beseeching me to come and live with them, for the reason that *they* love me so much ? But I tell them that there is some one loves me far, far better than they do. Am I not right in this, Papa ?

“ ‘ Now is there a very serious question to be asked. Tell me, and tell me true, have you

your Forget-me-not quite safely, or have you not? Has it been left forgotten—lost? ah! surely not. Mine is dried and beautiful still. Often have I pressed it to my lips, and *said blessings*, very childish blessings, but so fervent! Did you ever hear them? I thought that they might perhaps travel to you—right from my heart to yours—so linked are we, through some unseen agency, some mental electricity or other.’

“So the dear, happy-thoughted child runs on. I must certainly go to Beechwood in the morning, and get a better acquaintance with these wonderful little pets of hers, and see if we can accomplish the transfer of the little Maud to Somerton. Look, Doctor, how the last rays are gilding the old church tower—”

He was again speaking, when his countenance suddenly changed; he became very pale, and pressed his hand to his heart, looking as if he were stabbed with mortal pain.

“What *is* the matter?” exclaimed Dr. Merridan, in great alarm. “*What* is it? for God’s sake, speak, if you can. Brandy, Mrs. Abney, if you please! instantly.”

He seized the brandy *carafe* from her hand, rapidly poured out, and held it to Mr. Somers’s lips. A deep draught he took, and in a few

minutes was relieved, and speaking, though it was with difficulty.

"An agonizing pain at my heart, Luke : it comes without any warning whatever. But go with me to the library ; I am now easy ; in fact, quite well again. We shall be back with you immediately, Anna, so don't put on such an alarmed look," he said, as he smiled kindly at her expression of painful anxiety.

The rest must be given in Dr. Merridan's own words, as with choking voice, and tears of anguish that he could in no way control, he communicated it to Mr. Ferrand.

"He sat down when we reached the library, and quietly described the nature of the attack from which he had just recovered. Three or four previous ones had there been, coming on in the night ; he had been awakened from sleep by them ; one only had seized him in the daytime, and that was during his absence in Town. He spoke of feeling in perfect health, when in an instant would come an agony of pain at the heart, running down the left arm to his very fingers, and, coincident with it, a sensation of impending death.

"I listened in the deepest dismay to what he communicated. He stood in peril of his life, I knew : one such attack was the harbinger of

certain death ; it might be years hence, months hence, or it might be that very next hour, or even whilst he was then conversing with me the summons might come, and his place would be vacant, his voice heard by us no more.

“ ‘ Why have you not mentioned these attacks to me ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ I meant to do, to-night. I am no coward, Luke ; but I tell you candidly, that I feel to dread the return of these paroxysms of pain. It is awful while it lasts. You feel that unless relief comes, and that speedily, life cannot go on. But now let us return to Mrs. Abney : she is alarmed. After she has gone to bed we will come here again, and you shall, as you wish to do it, make this stethoscopic examination.’

“ We accordingly returned to the drawing-room, and quite reassured did Mrs. Abney seem by her brother’s serene and smiling countenance.

“ ‘ Will you, dear Anna, order a room to be prepared for the Doctor ? he and I are intending to sit for an hour or two, and have a chat. I dare say we shall touch upon homœopathy, and we will give you the result at the breakfast-table, if we make out anything new concerning it,’ he said, gaily and almost quizzically.

“ After she had retired, I made a rigorous

examination of the heart's sounds : no fresh light did it throw upon what he had told me ; and then he began to question me. You well know, Mr. Ferrand, how perfectly in vain it was for any one to attempt to deceive him. All gentle as his manner commonly was, it changed to one of such assured decision when he desired to learn the truth of a subject, such penetration into your very thoughts almost, that evasion was not merely difficult, it was impossible."

" ' Then, if I understand you aright,' he said, after much had passed, ' there is no cure of the cause ; but that care may do much in warding off these attacks of spasm, or *angina pectoris*, or whatever it may be called ?'

" ' Unceasing care there must be. I deeply regret that you did not name the subject to me before you went to Town, that I might have accompanied you to Dr. L—— ; but we will have him down before twenty-four hours are over. We must put you upon a system of living—diet, exercise, everything, regulated by plummet and line—and I do not doubt but we shall keep off the attacks. You must make up your mind to have me live with you altogether ; I don't mean to quit your house any more, but become a sort of double, or

familiar, from henceforth. Where you are, I will be.'

" 'Agreed, Luke,' he said, with a smile. 'But remember that nothing of this is to be made known to my child; neither by measure, nor word, nor look of precaution is she to become aware of this enemy within the walls, this foe of my own household. I will not have her joyous, bounding heart made sorrowful by the dread of the sword suspended over me.'

" He had retained the most perfect composure of manner till he spoke of *her*, Mr. Ferrand; but then his eye sank, and his voice faltered.

" 'Will you grudge sitting with me an hour or two longer?' he asked, when we had seemed to have well nigh concluded the discussion of the arrangements needful under the circumstances.

" 'I shall stay with you as long as you remain up,' I said; 'but if you will take my advice, you will go to bed; it is desirable after your indisposition, especially as you must avoid everything approaching fatigue.'

" 'But I feel quite well now, and there is some writing I wish to get done.'

" He rang the bell, and the butler appeared.

" 'Walton, will you bring us to-day's papers,

and then, as I shall not require your services in my room to-night, you can go to bed.'

"The papers were brought, and Walton was leaving the room, when Mr. Somers stopped him to inquire about his sister, who had been for some time ill, and he directed him to send a supply of wine both to her, and also to John Collins, in the morning.

"I took up a paper, and he commenced writing, and wrote on till the clock on the mantelpiece chimed out twelve. I saw that he had finished one letter, and commenced another. Suddenly he looked up, and said,

" 'I feel downright wearied ; I almost think I may venture to put aside this writing till the morning.'

" 'By all means do so. You must, indeed, avoid every fatigue.'

"I accompanied him to his room, gave him an opiate, and requested him not to rise in the morning till Dr. L—— had been, whom I had summoned by telegraph for an early hour.

" 'I will do anything and everything you wish, Merridan ; so that you keep my darling in ignorance of it all.'

"I placed a strong stimulating dose by his bedside.

"Now, should you feel the slightest recur-

rence of the pain, drink this at once; then ring your bell, I shall not fail to hear it. But I should much prefer remaining in your room. Let me do so.'

" 'I will not, indeed. I could not sleep if I thought you were watching me. So good-night, Luke; and unbroken rest to you,' he added, with a smile, as we shook hands.

"And I left him.

"It was perhaps two hours after," continued the Doctor, "that the deep stillness of the night was broken by the sound of a bell ringing. I was instantly up. I had not either slept, or taken off my clothes; for what I had seen and heard that night had filled me with the sorest trouble.

"Even whilst I was hurrying to his door, the bell rang again. I could distinguish from the sounds that many were rising from their beds, but I was first in his room. A look of mortal pallor was on his face; and the cold dews of agony were lying on his forehead. Opium I gave him instantly, with strong stimulants.

"Fearful was the emergency. Life could scarcely be kept going; and that killing pain would *not* be subdued. He was deathly cold; his pulse scarcely perceptible; and no

hot applications had power to bring back warmth.

“The paroxysms came in frightful strength. Then they relaxed hold a little ; but only to return again in fiercer mastery. Well I knew that that invaluable life was in most imminent peril. Nothing was there but opium and stimulants to trust to. Did *they* fail, then medicine would have no further aid to give. Only could we stand by and watch the mighty wrestling between life and death.

“ ‘ Oh, what stabbing pain it is, Doctor ! ’ he said, in a brief interval when the agony left him ; ‘ a little more of it, and you *must* die. ’

“ After a prolonged time of inexpressible anxiety, relief came : the paroxysms abated in strength ; he became warmer ; the opium was triumphing at last ; and I trusted the worst was over—not that we must relax in vigilance. Subtler, or more mysterious foe to life, never attacked it, than that we had to counteract and work against.

“ Almost as soon as he rallied, he began to think and care for those about him ; for all the household had risen at the call of an awful fear which had uplifted itself in the hush of night. And several of the older, more privileged servants, were in the room, bending on

him tearful eyes, and anxious to believe themselves of use, if only in holding a glass or cup for him.

“ ‘Now that I am so much relieved, Doctor, we will send some of these kind friends to bed. I am grieved to disturb the whole house in this way. Anna, my dear sister, do you go first; you will be quite ill with this interruption to your rest.’

“ ‘I will not leave you, brother,’ she replied, bending down and kissing his colourless lips, in deep agitation.

“ ‘With a look of inexpressible earnestness, he took her hand, and said :—

“ ‘Neither will you leave my child, Anna? promise me this.’

“ ‘Never, Adrian, never, so help me God!’ was her reply, with a passionate burst of sobbing and weeping.

“ ‘Shall we send for Miss Somers?’ I whispered.

“ ‘No, no, Luke! spare her. I would not have her here to witness this! Will you fetch me the paper I was writing before we came to bed? You know exactly where I placed it.’

“ I gave him more hot stimulant before I left the room, and was back again instantly

with the desired paper. In a low voice he said, as I placed it before him,—

“ ‘You saw where I put the letter that I finished writing?’

“ ‘Yes; I did.’

“ ‘Come a little nearer to me. If—— if—you understand me, Luke,—I entrust that letter to you, to give to my child, with your own hands; and also the withered flowers that are resting upon it. And, yourself tell her *all* that she must know—not more than is needful—not a word about the pain, the agony. Tell her that my last thoughts will be of her. Comfort her as much as you can—sorely will my child need comfort!’

“ I could only grasp his hand, Mr. Ferrand, for speech was gone from me.

“ ‘Now will you raise me a little, so that I can write? What I have to do, must be done whilst I have strength and power for it.’

“ So we raised him sufficiently to permit his writing, and he went on with it for some time. I stood beside him, with my fingers on his pulse.

“ ‘It is on me again, Luke!’ he suddenly said, and the pen dropped from his hand.

“ So it proved. That relentless and mysterious spasm (seemingly energized by the lull),

had leaped, at a bound, into life's very citadel, and was conflicting fiercely with its most vital powers and energies.

"Quickly was the conflict over. There was a cry from most intolerable agony—a few laborious strugglings and breathings—mighty, but vain efforts of the tortured heart, to free itself from that cramping, deadly incubus—and, life was fled.

"The earthly tenement was all that remained to us, of the refined—the intellectual—the noble Adrian Somers. *That* lay before our eyes, but the Man was gone."

CHAPTER VII.

“Mourn for the mourner, and not for the dead,
For he is at rest—but she in tears.”

Hebrew Dirge.

A FEW words from the Doctor sufficed to convey the appalling intelligence to Mr. Ferrand: silently and sorrowfully he carried that stricken child back to the bed, which she had quitted but a few hours before, so hopeful, and so happy. As he placed her, so she remained, still, pale, and absolutely unconscious.

Long did she so continue; but at length a low quivering, shuddering sob, broke from her; her eyes opened, and she saw them all standing round the bed.

Despair was in her look; she did not speak, but turned from them.

“Oh! darling, darling!” cried Lillas, clasping her round, and her tears raining fast; “what can I, shall I do, to comfort you?”

“You can do nothing at present, Mrs. Ferrand,” said the Doctor; “her grief must exhaust

itself. Let her have time—poor child! poor child! God help her, and temper it to her.”

Husky and inarticulate grew his voice as he spoke.

What a day followed! not one word did Mabel utter, but a low, eerie, heart-rending moan incessantly broke from her: all its weary hours did Liliás and her young sisters sit beside Mabel, and still came that faint, sad moan.

The rain never ceased, and the wind rose into tempest, its fierce blasts rising up, careering in mad triumph round the house, and fitfully dying in wild wailings, like the sound, muffled and plaining, of far-off spirit voices, mourning a sad doom: inexpressible dreariness was upon things within and without.

Mr. Ferrand had gone immediately to Somerton, to see if he could render assistance to Mrs. Abney, and had not returned; so Liliás and her sisters were left alone in their sorrowful day-vigil by the heart-stricken girl, whose low, dismal moan seemed answered by the loud, sobbing wind's lamentings.

“Oh, Liliás,” whispered the now thoroughly subdued Mary Earle; “I shall never forget that scene in the hall this morning, never—nor lose the sound of Mabel's awful cry; it

rings in my ears incessantly. It was I who chanced to see the Doctor's carriage passing, as I stood near the window, and told Mabel; and she ran into the hall, and opened the hall door herself, and stood looking at him so gaily as he ascended the steps.

" ' Good morning, Doctor,' she said, ' can you tell me if dear papa is come home ? ' "

" I stood beside her, and any one might see from his face, though he tried to smile, that there was something very sad to be told, for his mouth began to twitch and work so; and his feet seemed to linger so on every step, as if he did not wish to come in. Mabel, you could tell, got frightened, and looked at him very earnestly, but he shook hands with her quietly, and then asked for either Charles, or you—and was passing her, but she caught hold of his hand, and said,—

" ' What is it, Doctor—is anything the matter ? ' "

" He muttered something about wishing to see Mr. Ferrand immediately; and tried to get his hand from hers, but she held it fast; and fixed her eyes upon him as if she would read his very soul.

" ' What *is* the matter ?—You shall not pass me till I know—is papa—' how short and quick her breath came!—' is papa well, Doc-

tor? I will know—is he ill?—tell me at once.’

“He put a letter into her hand, said it was from Mrs. Abney, and she had better sit down and read it; she tried to open it, but couldn’t; her hands trembled so; and he opened it for her.

“‘I can’t read it—I can’t see. I’m this instant gone blind. Tell me the worst at once—is papa *very* ill?’

“‘Yes, he is.’

“Her face looked as if it was cut out of marble; Liliás, I never saw such a look as it wore. After a little while she seemed to master herself, and gather up her strength for the next question; and if her voice had sounded through the walls of a tomb, it couldn’t have been hollower, as she gasped out,—

“‘*Is papa dead?*’

“The Doctor didn’t speak; but it was enough; her eye glazed, and her sense went. That cry will ring in my ears till my dying day. I’m sure it will.”

Dr. Merridan arrived again in the evening to visit Mabel; he was the bearer of a note from Charles, telling that he found himself appointed one of Mr. Somers’s executors, and

that it was needful he should stay the night at Somerton ; but he should be home early in the morning.

Finding that Mabel still remained in the same state of almost unconscious stupor, the Doctor said he would give her a composing draught, that would probably bring refreshing sleep ; and in the morning, they might reasonably hope she would be better ; the tears would begin to flow ; ‘ they should do no good till those came,’ he added.

Lilias put her arm round Mabel, to raise her whilst she took the draught. Oh, what a white, woeful face was for a minute visible ! She did not once look up, though Lilias’s tones were soft and hushing, as a mother’s to her first-born ; but she took no notice, and sank down again upon her pillow.

“ She must not be left to-night, Mrs. Ferrand ; and if she seems in the slightest degree worse, send for me at once. You must expect a very sad awaking for her in the morning ; and I know not *how* you will comfort her. She will be long, I fear, before she overgets it ; there was such perfect love between them, as I never saw existing between any other parent and child.”

“ What the day has been in Somerton, and

the neighbourhood, is utterly out of my power to describe: the bewildering agitation, the breathless interest with which inquiries have been made; the bursting tears; and yet, in the midst of it all, momentary incredulity, and doubt as to whether it was true, that he who was so loved and honoured of all, could thus suddenly have passed away.—Yet we be left with none to fill up the great, wide, dreary blank his death has made.”

“If tears could bring him back to life, Doctor, he would soon be raised up; for high and low alike must feel that they have lost a friend who *cannot* be replaced.”

“They have, Mrs. Ferrand; we all have. He was emphatically a good man; he strove to be right, and to do right; and doubtless he hath found his place awaiting him in the kingdom of heaven.”

After the Doctor had taken his leave, they again resumed their watch beside Mabel. In the course of an hour the piteous moan ceased; she had sunk into slumber; they still retained their seats, listening to her quiet breathing, and every now and then speaking in low whispers, when all at once peculiar sounds were heard.

The evening was growing dusk, light had rapidly waned during the last half-hour, and save

a fitful gleam flashing up from the fire occasionally, they could scarce discern the objects in the room.

The sisters looked at each other, when again there came a low sobbing and wailing. Lilius bent over the bed, all was calm and still there, and she resumed her seat, and was speaking, when once more there rose a voice of grief, so near that it *must* be in the room. Panic-stricken, she looked round; for though not in the least superstitious, the shock of that most sudden death had left her nervous and easily impressed.

This she knew, and told herself not to be fanciful; it was absurd and ridiculous, and she must not yield to it. So she bravely kept her seat, but hearken intensely, painfully she did; and most surely, in that momentary hush of the stormy wind, were heard the unmistakeable sounds of sighing and weeping: that she must scream from terror if the thing went on, she felt; so with a strong effort she rose to ring the bell, but her young sisters clasped her hands, and with deep agitation besought her not to move.

“Do not stir, Lilius, nor move at all. What *can* it be? What shall we do? Hark, there it is again!”

So she sat down again, with eye and ear strained in fear of she knew not what ; when, all at once, her sister Susan's hand relaxed its trembling grasp of hers, and her head drooped till it reached the bed. She had fainted with affright.

The terror instantly passed from Liliás, and she ran to the bell ; she had to pass near the door in so doing, and then the sounds of wailing grief were most distinctly audible.

" I *will* see what it is ;—how childish I am ! " she murmured to herself. It was nevertheless with palpitating fear that she threw open the door, and beheld a figure in white ; but what, in that dim light, could not be discerned.

" What is it ? " she stammered out, only just able to speak.

" Me, Mamma, it is me ; " returned a voice from the thing in white.

" You, Maud ; what are you doing *here* ? Why are you not in bed ? "

" I have been, Mamma ; but couldn't sleep for thinking of Mabel ; so I came to listen at her door, if I could hear her voice. May I see her, Mamma, only look at her ? "

" No, my darling ; Mabel is very ill. "

Again the child burst out sobbing and weeping.

“O Mamma, tell her; do tell her, that Maud came to pray, ‘God bless her,’ at her door.”

Kissing the little loving-hearted creature, Liliás carried her back to her nursery, where she had only just been missed. Sad was the day the little girl had spent—refusing to eat, crying incessantly, and offering up sweet, fervent, childish prayers, that God would comfort Mabel.

Consciousness was soon restored to Susan Earle, by the application of proper remedies, and she smiled at the weakness she had shown; but she still looked pale, and turned a disquiet eye hither and thither; starting at shadows on the wall, and listening with a pained ear to what she fancied were strange or unusual sounds. So Liliás sent both her and the stronger-nerved Mary to their bedrooms; and alone took her seat, for the night-watch, beside Mabel, who, hour after hour, slept on without movement or sound.

It was not till after streaks of light were visible in the eastern sky, the stars were paling, and the tempestuous wind had died away into low, hollow gusts, that Liliás herself dropped off into slumber on a sofa beside the fire. How long she had lain there she could not tell; but it must have been

some hours, when she awoke to consciousness, and found that Mabel was sitting up,—the stupor gone—the grief come.

Seated on a chair with her back to Liliás, her face buried in her hands, her hair, escaping from the net which bound it, was hanging in thick dishevelled masses over her white dressing gown. She was rocking to and fro in the wildest abandonment of despairing woe; phrensied words intermingling with convulsive sobs, till, like a leaf in the wind, she shook and trembled.

She was calling her father back — back, should he, must he come, for—she could not live without him,—“*she could not live without him.*”

“Merciful God!” she cried, “that he, my father, should die; and I, his loved, his only one, not be beside him, to kneel by him—clasp him, with love unutterable—pray by him, and win him back from that terrible death—me, most miserable, and unnatural daughter.”

What frenzy it was! less grief than despair was in it. Ever as she finished so she began—

“O, my father!—O, my father! back—Come back!”

CHAPTER VIII.

" Her living lips were burning
On the cold ones of the dead."

MRS. HEMANS.

No pen can describe the interview which took place that morning between Mabel and Dr. Merridan, when he communicated to her the mournful particulars of her father's death ; and delivered into her hands his last letter, and the withered " Forget-me-not."

" Never before had he passed through such a scene," said the Doctor, " and God in his great mercy forbid his ever having to pass through such another."

Mabel, when it was over, lay passive and utterly exhausted on the bed, her eyes closed—all strength gone. The one drop of inextinguishable bitterness in the overflowing cup, was, that she had not been with him ; that she did not pillow his head—or clasp his hand—or raise *her* voice to God for help in that terrible hour of mortal pang. She was away from him in his extremity. " Yes, she, heart-

less, and most unnatural daughter, *was laughing, singing, dancing, when he lay dead.*"

For that—for that, there was no "balm in Gilead,"—no oil and wine to heal the immedicable wound.

Mr. and Mrs. Ferrand accompanied her back to Somerton that evening. The hall was lined with weeping servants, waiting to receive their young mistress. Never before had she met them without kind greetings; now, but for Charles's arm, she would have fallen; her head was bowed down as she passed through their ranks, and heavy—heavy sobs shook her whole frame.

The aunt and niece met without a spoken word, but gazed into each other's face.

Night fell upon the sorrowful house, and again Liliás shared Mabel's room; irresistibly drawn was she to the bereaved and cast-down young creature, who seemed stricken altogether beyond her strength to bear. Mabel lay with shut eyes, very pale and still; only shuddering, long-drawn sighs, betokening that she was not slumbering. Liliás did not mean, or wish to sleep, but it had been a very agitating day, and her previous night's rest so insufficient for what nature craved, that unconsciously she sank into repose, the last sound she heard

being the booming out of the hour of one from the large office clock. All in the room was then still, and throughout the house reigned the completest hush and silence, broken at length by Mabel Somers rising up. Quietly does she put on her dressing-gown, light her candle at the night-light, and with resolved look and step, leave the room.

Noiseless is her foot-fall, as she threads her way through a long, wide corridor, nor pauses once. Her errand may be guessed; she was going to the death-chamber, there to hold communion. She reached it, entered, and gently closed the door. There were no watchers,—it was Mr. Somers's own request that there should be none; but numerous lights were burning in the room, which was draped entirely with black. Closely were the curtains drawn around the bed; she undrew them on one side—her hand did not falter, nor her heart throb—*there* lay the dim and shadowy outlines of her father's form.

Down she knelt, and gazed upon it with straining eyes, with hands clasped wildly together, and every feature quivering almost to convulsion.

“Father—my father!” was heard, and again fell silence. “My father, rise up and come to

me! be not deaf and dumb to your Mabel, whom you have loved so. Lie not so still *there*, when I call you so. Come, my father, come to me; it is your own dear Mabel that calls," broke from her lips, in low, soft, caressing accents.

Was there still a faint hope in that deeply-loving heart, that at the sound of the voice dearest to him on earth, he *would* break his deathly fetters, and rise up once more? It might be so,—we know not. But wait and wait she did, for response to her wild, passionate appeal; when response there could be none.

From her knees she rose at length, and with a reverent, but unshrinking hand, removed the covering which hid from her sight the cast-off garment of mortality. And now she stands face to face with the dead. For the first time she looked upon death; but at its visible presence and aspect felt no fear.

Love had subordinated and cast out all fear.

Long and fixed was her gaze upon the set, impassive features, and the marble brow—upon the contour of the full-orbed eye, so distinctly visible through the veiled lid. Death's seal was set, but its first rigidity was passing away, and the lip-lineaments softening into

something approaching to a smile. But, oh, what strange, dark shadows, and what sunken lines couched there !

She bent down and pressed her lips upon the temples, where the dark and glossy hair, with which not a single silver thread was mingling, lay so abundantly; then she swept it aside that she might gaze the better; and as she gazed she murmured to him in broken faltering accents, words, she knew not what; but full of intensest love, of unutterable grief.

"He had tasked her too much," she said, "to require her to live without him,—too much; she could not do it."

And as she spoke, she kissed the brow, the cheek, the lips with passionate fervour; but she shed no tears. Then stopped and gazed again, and smiled.

Fearful was the depth of love, lying in that smile. All was very still and calm; he smiled not to her smile, nor spake in answer to her beseeching; she craved him to lift his hand and bless her once—but once again; yet, nor foot, nor hand stirred; nor eyelid quivered under his child's agonized gaze.

And now she takes the cold, cold hand in hers, and pressing it to her bosom, asketh him "if that was the hand which wrote those most

precious lines to her, even after he was stricken with death? Ever was he thinking of his Mabel, never of himself."

"Will you, my father, love me still; will you help me to bear this load of sorrow, which seems to bewilder me and take my sense away—to bear it, and be calm as befits your child, bearing your name?"

Her head she laid upon the cold, unyielding breast—long had it pillowed her, it must pillow her still; and drawing forth from her bosom the last letter and the withered flowers, laid them o'er the heart which had for ever ceased its beatings.

"These must lie upon your heart, my father; and never again separate from mine.—The bond there was between us is still between; but you are in Heaven, and I, unhappy daughter, am left on earth: never more may I see you with my bodily eyes, but we shall be together still."

And with long, burning kisses, and with passionate claspings, she prayed him for forgiveness of that strange and wretched daughter—none other could ever be unnatural as she—who danced and sang whilst he lay dead, who had calmly slept whilst *he* lay dying of terrible inward pain.

“Forgive — forgive — I knew not what I did! Oh, with what an agony of supplication she implored him for pardon of her involuntary sin! She beseeched him not to remember it against her, now she herself was dying—she *was* dying, she knew, for those sensations *must* be the approaches of death. She was cold as ice; faint and fainter she grew, her heart scarce beat; her head swam; strange rushing sounds, as of innumerable wings, were in her ears; she no longer saw distinctly, even the rigid form before her; broken words and murmurs came at intervals, telling—

“That she was coming to him, following fast; her heart was crushed and broken, she *must* come; she had no fear to follow where his foot had trod.”

Then dimness floated round her. Again a faint glimmering sense of where she was; in whose presence—the uplighted room, the funereal drapery—that open letter—the withered flowers also; her head was pillowed on a marble pillow, and yet did she know that it lay upon his breast, for whose love, living or dead, she yearned with irrepressible yearnings.

(Calmly she was departing; together they had lived, together should they be sepulcher'd.)

But that dreamy perception was soon lost in bewildering shadows that came and went ; and in that feeble fluttering of her sad, bruised heart, from which, she knew, life was surely ebbing.

With her last faint breath she whispered—

“ My father, pardon—forgive ! ”

And feeling altogether ceased ; to all outward and external sense, she died.

That life had waned and passed, but another dawned. She was alone in a shallop, on some far-off sea ; the slight, frail vessel—as of reeds it was—bore her on, on, for ever on—whither she knew not, cared not. She had done with hope and fear ; there was no more joy or sorrow, thought or care ; nor yet sun, nor moon, nor stars, nor Bible, nor heaven. Ages and ages gone by, there had been Time ; she had dwelled in it, had heard singing-birds, and children’s happy laughter, had basked in sunshine, gathered flowers, and looked upon green pastures.

But a far-back memory it was, so deep engulfed in the lapse of ages that only dim and dreamy shadows of it flitted before her, and were gone again. But all that was now was real. Day and night—but *there* was no day nor night—she was borne over that illimitable ocean : with

out bound, without dimension was it, where length, breadth, height, and time, and place were lost ; nor blue its waters, nor green, but dull and leaden-hued, with neither crested wave nor gentle plashing ripple to break its weird, dead stillness. Tideless, surgeless, fathomless, no plummet had ever gone down to its depths, nor life existed there ; neither sea-birds flying, nor sea-weed floating by.

For ever had she drifted out of life, and light, and warmth ; but for that she cared not—cared not that other creature in that place, living or lifeless, to be found was none. Scarce was her heart beating : yet she heard its feeble pulses—the only sound that met her ears—day and night : but there was no day or night, no morn, no closing eve.

Once was the silence broken ; there came a voice—it must have been some pitying angel's, for its tones were divinest music, and filled the whole wide space around with sweetness—which said, "My child ! my child !" Before had she heard that voice, those words, and she upsprung wildly to clasp ; but finding nothing, listless and heavy, she sank down again.

So she went on over that dull Lethean sea, where there needed no beacon or lighthouse, for there was no rock. What men call "effort"

was not wanted there, with nothing to avoid or shun, nothing to steer for. She was alone—alone ; but for that she shed no tears. Had she yielded to them, let them flow for all this silence and this desolation—for Life had died, Death lived, and reigned supreme—they would have filled that sea—that it had burst its bounds ; so she restrained them, and went on—on. Sleep or dream she did not : she was awake ; she lived a weary life, dismal and death-like, thinking of no harbour ; *there* would be none to meet her, no eye beam welcome, no hand grasp hers ; but for this she cared not : on—on—with a leaden sea, a leaden sky, a still more leaden soul.

Time limitless and immeasurable went by, and left no record with her, save that she was hoar and old, but should never die : still would she lie there, going on—on—for ever.

But, at length, over those vast, desolate waters stole soft sounds, a sound of sweet-toned chiming bells. Was it a Sabbath summons to God's temple ? Was it a bridal peal ? Had heir been born to an ancient house, and joyous bells rung out in such depth of gladness that the echoes were borne far, far away, immeasurable miles, over a pathless,

trackless sea? Or were there populous cities lying far below, where they consecrated churches, whose bells rang men to worship and to prayer?—of such she had heard and read. Aye, it must be so, for the chime had a muffled sound, as rising up from untold depths. Listening to their harmony lay she, a lone mariner on that far-off sea; their sweet yet mournful tones floating into her dreary heart, and leaving it not so dreary.

Never was anything so touching: a pealing chime, and then a low, faint echo, answering from spirit-land. Tears she had not shed, since that far-back time, of which there came glimpses, and pleasant fancies of living on a smiling earth, under a laughing heaven; but now like something blessed was that soft undertone, from her sad, heavy heart lifting a weight, a load, so that her tears might flow; and flow they did, as though they would not cease again.

Soon, in strange mingling with that subduing chime, were murmuring voices, speaking words of deep thanksgiving for some special mercy: broken, but very fervent were they. And her eyes opened bewilderedly on kind, most anxious faces, on which stood tears,

answering to her own ; she was clasped in the arms of one and another ; she lay on her own bed, bright sunshine streaming into the room. She had drifted into life and warmth again, no longer fettered by that dismal phantom wherein her o'erwrought brain had taken refuge.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Slowly, with measured tread,
Onward they bear the dead
To his long home.
Short grows the homeward road,
On with their mortal load,
Oh, Grave, they come !

“ Yet—yet, ah ! hasten not
Past each remember’d spot
Where he hath been ;
Where late he walk’d in glee,
There, from henceforth to be
Never more seen.”

The Last Journey.

THE mourning peal which had brought such refreshing baptism to Mabel’s parched and apathetic soul, daily rang out, when any of the ancient house of Somers lay in still and silent death, waiting commitment to the dust from which they were taken.

Two voices had that peal ; one, infinitely triumphant and exulting, said,—

“ Rejoice—rejoice. Heaven hath another saint.”

But the other, soft and tender, made reply,—

“ Hush, brother, and speak low ! *I* hear sounds of weeping, mourning, as of souls in pain. Earth hath lost, though heaven hath won. Hush—speak low ! ”

A large and imposing assemblage of friends and tenantry gathered together to accompany to the grave the mortal remains of Adrian Somers. Strictly private, in accordance with the expressed wish of the departed, it was to be ; but from far and near, from hall and mansion, from farmstead and cottage, had come the request for permission to attend the funeral obsequies, to be present, when he, they knew so well, honoured so truly, was laid in the house appointed for all living.

Bright and fresh was the day, the sun rode triumphantly in the heavens, with scarce a cloud to intercept his rays ; in strange discord with it, was the solemn tolling of the bell at half minute time. But slight sympathy with mourning hearts had external nature ; its look and aspect was wholly festal. The way lay chiefly through the park, and full in view was the old church tower, which the eyes, now closely sealed in death, had gazed upon, when the mellow sunset rays had defined and brought it out so clearly.

The change from the intolerable noontide glare, to the cool shadiness of the still churchyard, was most impressive. A lime avenue led up to the main entrance of the church, then branched aside to the river's sloping bank, and skirted it, forming a beautiful walk. Fine, separate trees, of most umbrageous growth, waved over grassy graves; through whose bowery foliage soft gleams of sunlight fell quiveringly and lovingly upon the gentle mounds, and gleaming head-stones.

And now all were gathered around the open vault, where lay the ashes of those who had borne the name of Somers. Generation after generation had lived, died, and met together *there*.

The voice of the aged minister arose in that most beautiful service of our church for the burial of the dead. Weak and tremulous were his tones at first, he was labouring under deep emotion, but they became calmer—grief was lost in solemnity.

The service was over, and all pressed forward to take their last look of the coffin so soon to be hidden from mortal gaze, those near giving place to them who had stood farther off. Many a quivering lip was seen,

many a broad chest heaved with repressed emotion as they gazed down, taking a wordless farewell.

But the aged minister's voice again was heard, and every other sound was hushed that they might listen to his words.

"Men and brethren, it is, I know, a little out of custom, I trust not out of season, that I should address a few words to you on the solemn occasion which has called us together this day; the laying in the grave the mortal body of one, who has lived amongst us all his life as child, as youth, as man.

"There are many here, myself for one, who can remember well his birth, and how joyful was this neighbourhood, that a son was born unto the house of Somers. Friends of the poor have they been always. It has been a good name, none have borne it but have been good, that is, humanly speaking; they have sought to befriend the friendless, and to elevate their kind. We must judge men by man's standard—we are not as Gods to know good and evil. Nearly all of you can remember the marriage of Adrian Somers, and what a sweet-tongued, gentle lady he brought as his wife amongst us; you must well remember, too, how soon, how very soon, he stood here—

where you stand—bowed down by harrowing grief, committing her body to the grave's keeping. Sixteen years hath she lain here; and now ye bring him to join his dead.

“Men and brethren, I would ask you whether there are any here have aught against Adrian Somers? hath he oppressed any, hath he defrauded any, hath he of any taken a bribe to blind his eyes therewith? speak, my brethren.”

A low murmur mingled with sobs arose.

“Then in the righteousness that he hath done, shall he live, for it hath been showed thee, O man, what is good—and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

“For myself, I have seen the coming and going of seventy winters, and little did I ever think I should be called upon to lay *his* honoured head in the dust. But God's ways are not our ways, he setteth man his appointed time.

“I am told that the only thought which disturbed the mind of our departed friend and brother, after his Master's call, was the thought of the one only lamb of his fold,—there were no fears to dismay his soul at the dread summons to meet his Lord, and that instantly;

but this one tender lamb being left so desolate and lone, disturbed and made anxious his dying moments.—Ye are most of you fathers, and can understand that this would be so—yet even here his faith failed him not, all that he could do for her well-being, he did, and commending her to the Great Shepherd of souls, the Father of all orphans, died in love, not fear, as a Christian should die.”

“There are many amongst us with the hoar head, and honourable is it when it is found in the ways of righteousness. But this man’s sun was quenched at noon : in the full vigour of maturity, in the pride of unquenched strength, in the high elevation of his noble intellect, the voice said, ‘Come!’

“He that is fit to live is fit to die, my brethrep. It becomes not us to picture how heaven’s golden gates were flung wide open to admit our departed brother—the mortal lost in the immortal, the earthly body for ever cast aside, and replaced by the spiritual; nor how the welcoming saints heralded him with triumphant harmonies to the everlasting mansions; nor how those, whom he had loved, but had gone before, rejoiced over him with heaven’s completeness of joy—their own for evermore.”

“But it does become us to inquire into the

nature of that peace which neither faltered nor failed when the dread summons came. Death *is* an awful thing, my brethren.—To look into ourselves, and learn whether *we* have it to repose on, should we be as suddenly called to awaken from this dream of life, as he was.

“Men and brethren, are ye all—are ye any, fit to die as this man died? His serene soul moved not—breathed in perfect tranquillity—knew not fear; and why was this? I will tell you.

“His life had fitted him for his death—see ye to it. ‘Ye know not the day, nor the hour.’”

Almost every knee in that mingled throng was bent, ere the aged clergyman concluded his address; and as his voice rose, speaking of his Divine Master, then fell, became tremulous and faint, when referring to the departed; sobs, that would not be controlled, were heard; and bowed down was many a face, to hide the working features, and the falling tears.

Memorable was the scene, not only in itself, but in its associations. The venerable minister, —his hair bleached by the snows of seventy winters—the flowing white robe encircling his tall figure—his hand pointing down to the grave, or raised upwards towards the heavens of which he was speaking—his eye kindling and glowing

with holy fervour—looked as we may suppose the Apostles and Annunciators of old looked, when communicating to Jew and Gentile the new and strange dispensation, which commanded them “to love one another.”

Blending and mingling with his solemn and mournful accents, were the gay voices of the singing birds; the bright winged butterflies were flitting about in the summer air; the honey bees pursuing their busy thrift to their own low, cheerful music.

All creation spoke of life existent and exultant; the meridian sun in the summer heaven, the light breeze which softly and wooingly came, stealing the white-thorn's odours as it passed, scattering its pearly blossoms o'er the graves in frolic play, and waking pleasant murmurs in the affluent leafiness of the fine old trees. The tender grass under foot, the blue firmament over head, all looked smiling; bright with present, tangible, natural life; and death, too, spoke of life, earnest, purposeful, spiritual, in the world that seems so far off, but is so near: so at the door; one step forward and we have done with shadows, and grasp living realities.

The funeral peal rang out again, telling that the burial rites were over—the grave had closed over Adrian Somers.

But the fine-strung, spiritual ear, alone, and not the mere natural one, could distinguish its dual voices.

In high, uplifted, lofty triumph, did it rise, proclaiming, that one had rested from his labours, had gone home; ever and for ever in the Courts of Peace to dwell.

“ Rejoice—rejoice,” it said, “ Heaven hath another saint ! ”

But the second, subdued and plaintive, whispered softly,

“ Hush—hush, brother, and speak low ! I hear words of anguish, sounds of weeping—wailing. Earth hath lost what Heaven hath won. Hush, speak low ! ”

Mr. Somers' last letter to his daughter.

“ Do you, my dear young daughter, remember a conversation we once held together upon ‘ *the divining soul* ? ’ You, in reading, had met with the phrase, were struck with it, and came to me to inquire what I thought was the particular meaning intended to be conveyed by the expression ‘ *the divining soul* ; ’ and how, when we had talked it over, we found that to both it conveyed the same sentiment and meaning. You have not, I feel assured, forgotten

that conversation ; and to your memory do I refer you for its full purport.

(How pleasant have these conversations, these interchanges of thought between us been, my Mabel, and what a quickening of love has arisen from them!)

But to return to my subject, ‘ the divining soul ;’ such, my child, have I now ; born of what, suggested by what, I cannot tell. Shadows from the unseen world are ever dimly present to my mental sight ; monitions about my bed and path, continually, whisperings, and warnings, *that I must leave you.*

The conviction day by day strengthens, grows upon my mind that I am summoned away ; that the Dispenser and Giver of Life sees fit from me to recal the gift.

It may be—it may not be ; infinite trust do I feel in the All-Merciful ; that He willeth is sufficient for us, His creatures. But I would not willingly depart without some last words to you, my only, my most beloved child. Words of warning, of advice, and maybe some of comfort ; but all of such deep—deep—love. When I think of leaving you, all fatherless, motherless, brotherless, and sisterless as you will be, my heart well-nigh fails me ; eagerly would I clutch hold on life ; but it may not be

—I feel it may not be. So, to the inevitable, do I resign myself; and to your Heavenly Father commend you in undoubting faith, that He will guard your inner and outer life from touch of ill—that He will lead, care for, and rest you safe in Heaven's rest.

Never, never, my darling, lose your trust in God,—hold fast to it; whatever may befall, cleave fast to Him; in your bright youth, your innocence, and guilelessness and truth, set Him alway before you. And seek to know yourself, my child. Not many glaring errors, or grievous outward faults have you to combat; but rest not in that, search out the hidden ones, and especially, beware of the leaven of selfishness,—let not its canker eat into your soul; remember that it assumes many guises; has Protean hues and shapes: if you detect and cast it out as some foul thing of darkness, it will perhaps come next, robed as an angel of light. Watch against selfishness, my daughter, watch with sleepless vigilance.

Your angel-mother, my Mabel, of whom you have no memory, loved you with fondest love: with what a rapture of affection she clasped you, pressed you to her bosom; with heart and eye and lip alike, thanking God for the gift of you; whilst on you she

poured kisses of such ineffable love, as only mothers know! How she watched for your dawning smiles; how she yearned and thirsted, to hear once, but once, your infant voice syllabbling her name! But this exquisite happiness she knew not, 'twas denied to her; she passed away ere you had strength or power to articulate a word; she passed to her native Heaven, leaving you motherless,—me, a widower; never on this earth to find consolation for her loss.

With her latest breath she bade me love her child. Have I done so, my Mabel—*have I* loved her child? Has the tie between us been other than that of the strongest human affection? has discord ever once come between us; has the mirror of our love, at any time, waxed cold and dim?

'Never,' my child would say with eager heart and soul, could she respond to my question; and, Mabel, with this answer, I can meet your sainted mother; and when she asks me tidings of her only one, tell her, that her child *has* been loved enough, and will be worthy of the mother that bore her. Yes, that she will be worthy of the mother that bore her.

See that you cultivate happiness, and the

means of it; be gay and glad, and enjoy your golden days of youth; partake of, and enter into all rational amusements,—be assured that God has set no dread command against innocent delights,—shut not yourself up, but go into society, that you may shake off prejudice; travel, cultivate your taste for the refined and beautiful; read, observe, think, and strive to gain an expanded and reflecting mind.

Fail not to do good; give, and give liberally and graciously; remember, ‘he who loveth God, must love his brother also.’ Much will lie in your power, and ‘the poor ye have with you always.’ Forget not that on you alone devolves the name and the honour of our house, of a long and unstained line.

And above and beyond all things, my Mabel, keep the end in view,—the end which is but the beginning of life for evermore. Sacrifice not the future to the present,—withstand the whisperings of expediency—be proof against smiles, or tears, or frowns, or most envenomed contumely—regard them not, *do right*, and fear not. This I bid you.

And remember *me*, my daughter; most dear daughter of my heart, let it not be with sorrowful remembrance, but with a serene

and happy memory of the many pleasant years we have lived together, when our souls have knitted, as it were, and increased in love to each other ; and think not, that in passing away from your mortal sight, the infinite love existing between us has passed away, too—it cannot die ; quenchless it is,—of the spirit, and for ever abideth—not gross, fleshly, laid down at death.

Farewell for a little season (we shall meet again, my child, my Mabel, where there are no more partings) ; with ineffable tenderness do I bid you farewell, and bless you in my inmost soul with blessings, that I may not speak. Child of unspeakable love, child of unnumbered prayers, be happy in your days and years, in your heart and life ; and when that life is done, come to *us*, meet *us* in the radiant Heavens ; where the Father, and the Mother, awaiting that day, will know and welcome their own again.

ADRIAN SOMERS."

"SOMERTON,
Near Midnight, 1st of May."

CHAPTER X.

"In loving hope with him unseen,
Walk as in hallow'd air."

SCARCE did the anxious Lillas leave Mabel's side, when the quick, passionate tears *must* find their way; there she was, ready to throw her arms round the o'erwrought girl; and, in tones of gentlest solicitude, bid her rest on her, and weep. No words of consolation did she offer (all useless would they be), but strove to make her know and feel that love, strong and real, was about her still.

Fearfully ill was Mabel looking; turning with such sick loathing from giving any care to the body; while her soul was faint with anguish. Food she scarce touched; sleep she could not, and her heavy-lidded eyes, brooked not the light of day in her apartment; she paced its bounds in restless agony of desolation; she stopped to weep tears, burning tears, which gave her no relief; she strove to pray, but the words of supplication changed

to those of despairing sorrow, as they issued from her lips.

But such overwhelming grief is too exhausting to continue long. Kill it *must*, or mitigate its strength. The God she was almost forgetting, forgot not *her*. He, who had called her father from her, showed that He would be a Father to her.

Bitter as Marah's waters were those inflowing into her soul. But some unseen hand—most gracious—came, and threw into the fountain of grief, wondrous properties and virtues, wholesome and healing. Power she got to see into herself; to see that this extreme indulgence of her sorrow, this absolute refusing to be comforted, was selfish in its essence.

Numbers were mourning for him;—had she evinced any consideration, thought of any, save herself? She had not; and yet how emphatically had *he* warned her against selfishness in its every shape and form!

“Loved far better than this must you be, my father,” she murmured. “Whilst I deemed that I was sorrowing for you, it was all for self—self. How imperfect has my love been! but it must be purified; it must be carried into life; must blossom, and bear fruit; not be desolating, but fructifying. This deep love,

which lies at the very fount of my being, and my onward life, must be reconciled. Father, do you know all my anguish? Are you about me still? I feel, I know you are; even in death you would not desert your Mabel."

But, alas! for her efforts at composure, however near he might be to her, yet eye could not see, nor ear hear, nor ever her hand grasp his again; and once more the tide of sorrow flowed back; prayers and sobs mingling together.

Overmastered though she was for the time, yet she made more brave efforts, again to surrender helplessly, again to strive. She asked for resignation, on her knees meekly petitioning, rose up, and altogether lost it.

Very slowly did her young mind and thoughts rise up out of that dark gulf of death in which they had been lost; soar they could not, nor as yet look up to where Hope sat, serene and dove-like, in the heavens. *There* it was that he she mourned so bitterly had bade her meet him; and with what upspringing rapture would she do so, when the summons came.

But oh, life was so long—her numbered years so few!

It was the evening of the day on which

Mr. Somers's funeral had taken place ; and the erewhile closed shutters were thrown open ; light and sunshine again streamed broadly in through the cheerful windows, and the last lingering death-shadow had passed from off the house,—that Mr. Ferrand was sitting conversing with Mabel in her room. It was a happy surprise to him to find her calm, able to converse ; and he expressed the pleasure that he felt.

“ Grief does not kill, cousin,” said Mabel, with a sad voice and trembling lip.

And then he proceeded gently to tell her of the needful ceremony to be gone through—that of reading the will, at which, as her father's sole representative, it was very desirable she should be present.

But the sad quivering and trembling became uncontrollable ; her face was hidden in Liliass' bosom, whilst she wept and sobbed in a renewed agony of grief, which for long she could not master.

Charles sat with her hand resting in his own (no brother could be tenderer to a dearly-loved young sister than he was to Mabel), and after a time she was able to listen to him again.

“ I have, dear Mabel, arranged with Mr. Walshe to meet in the library at twelve, to-

morrow, to learn the contents of the will. Of course we are all anxiously desirous to follow out your dear father's intentions and wishes ; but we must first know what they are. *You*, I am sure, will not be behind any of us in fulfilling their letter and spirit."

The hand he held grasped his, and her voice thrilled with emotion, as she replied :—

"I will not, Cousin : it will be the first object of my life. Oh ! if I may but become like my father,—be his child in soul and spirit, as well as in blood ; *this* must I strive for, if it be ordained that I *must* live without him ; this will I set before myself ; this will I do, walk in *his* steps, the light from his life falling on my life's path. Do *you* believe, Cousin, that the dead are about us still ; that they watch over us, speak to us even ; come back to us in dreams, when the body slumbers, and the soul walks abroad unfettered ? "

"I see no reason for disbelieving it, Mabel, or thinking that love is sifted and winnowed from the soul, when the separating veil has fallen between it and us. Indeed, I know not of what the soul *could* be compounded, if its affections perished, or were laid aside ; they are doubtless, assayed and purified to heaven's
here."

“Then you will not think me wild and visionary in telling you that I believe—nay, I am sure—that, in spirit, I have my father with me still. Oh, Cousin, Cousin, I should lay me down and die of grief, if I felt that I had altogether lost him,—that his love was not still overshadowing and present with me!”

Long did he sit conversing with her, and with most solicitous kindness enter into her feelings; and though Mabel's tears were streaming, yet more of self-command had come; and she promised him to be present on the morrow, and see some of the numerous friends and relatives staying in the house; and, further, to gird up herself to enter upon life's duties and requirements without delay.

CHAPTER XI.

"The warning voice I know
From other worlds, a strange mysterious tone."
Mozart's Requiem.

AT noon on the following day, Mr. Ferrand proceeded to Mabel's room, and found her, though very pale, yet calm, and prepared to accompany him. He drew her arm within his, and they proceeded to the library, where many of her nearer family connexions and relatives were assembled, and also Mr. Walshe, the family solicitor.

All rose to greet her, and Mr. Ferrand led her round to one and another; no lack of interest was there in look and tone; it was not possible that there could be other than sympathy for that reft and desolate child, whose grief had been well nigh despair.

Her uncle, Colonel Vallancey, a man of fine countenance, and firm, decided, concentrated air, stepped forward, with much warmth and cordiality of manner to embrace her, accompanying his kiss with—

“ God bless and comfort you, my poor, dear child ! ”

Alas ! for the composure she had so striven and prayed for, those few kind words undid it all. Charles supported her to a chair, and Lilius was quickly at her side, whispering such words of gentle solicitude as only women *can* whisper. Infinitely distressed looked the Colonel, as her convulsive sobs fell upon the ear with most uncomfortable distinctness, in the quiet room. But self-control at length returned, and the reading of the document commenced. This it is needless to follow through all its legal technicalities and ramifications. It is sufficient to state, that every precaution a wise and prudent father could take to guard a young orphan daughter, Mr. Somers had taken. The fine, landed, perfectly unencumbered property of Somerton, with a clear rental of seven thousand a-year, was her inheritance.

Stringent regulations were there as to its being settled upon herself in the event of her marrying ; which, whatever marriage engagement she might form, was not in any case to take place till she had attained the age of twenty-one. It was added that she would do well to consult the judgment of her

guardians, Mr. Ferrand and Colonel Vallancey, on her choice in marriage, and give their opinions every consideration; though they could not control, they might assist her by their counsel in the matter.

Did she die unmarried, she was empowered to will her large property to any relative, or relatives; or did she so please, bequeath it for some worthy purpose. Mrs. Abney was most amply remembered. To Dr. Merridan, with a delicate allusion to their long and intimate friendship, was bequeathed a splendid collection of coins, and scientific instruments.

Annuities were left to many of the older domestics, who had deserved such remembrance from long and faithful service in the family of the Somers, placing them above all need of further servitude with any.

The most considerate and perceptive thoughtfulness marked the whole disposition of the property.

Mr. Ferrand and Colonel Vallancey were appointed executors as well as guardians. The reading of the will necessarily occupied a considerable time; and there was yet another document to be read, during which Mabel's presence was not requisite, nor even desirable,

so she now retired from the room with Mrs. Abney and Liliás.

“The paper I am next about to produce,” said Mr. Walshe, “is not a legal document, for it has never been attested; but as it embodies other wishes of the lamented deceased, it must, of course, be brought forward, though I am bound to state that compliance with its requirements is not necessarily binding upon any of the parties specified, owing to the fact I mentioned. It is in law no better than mere waste paper.”

“Let us hear it, by all means,” came from one and another.

“It will be as binding, I fancy, as if it were a legal and compulsory document,” observed Colonel Vallancey, in a fine, sonorous, slightly-peremptory voice.

A little more amplification ensued from Mr. Walshe, ere he commenced the reading of the following letter, which was addressed to Mr. Ferrand, and commenced thus:—

“In the event of my sudden death, I wish you to take upon yourself the direction of the matters needful to be attended to. At once place yourself in communication with the Messrs. Walshe, of London, with whom

my will is deposited, and who are perfectly acquainted with all my affairs. You will find yourself and Colonel Vallancey appointed executors, and also guardians of my child. It is of her I would chiefly write, and express my wishes concerning her future.

“ I do not think that whilst she is so young, Somerton can afford her a desirable residence, for many reasons ; one is, her peculiarly unprotected position ; another, her sensitive, yet tenacious character : there will be too many mournful associations about the place, to allow it to be a fit abode for her. Yet I do not wish her to remove far from the scene of her future duties and interests ; and where, I trust, she will be a blessing to many. Under these circumstances, I can think of no better arrangement than for her to come with Mrs. Abney, and reside under your own roof, if you and your excellent Lilies are willing to give a home to my desolate child.

“ You will see by my will that she may not contract marriage before she attains her majority ; by that age, I trust, her judgment may approve what her affection dictates. But if she has not at that period formed any matrimonial engagement, then had she better pass back to Somerton, and make it her settled

abode; of course, under every outward precaution and protection. She will be old enough to understand the proprieties and responsibilities of her position, and can enter upon it. Advise her; care for her—I beg you.

“ A greater obligation than this I feel I could not ask from you,—a home, a shelter for my child. An obligation in every sense of the word, save one—a pecuniary one, it must not be. Whilst she and Mrs. Abney remain with you, an annual payment of one thousand pounds will be secured to you; the first payment to be made on the day she passes from her own home to yours.

“ Let her receive all judicious society she pleases, and let her have whatever servants, horses, carriages, she may require, as the mistress of Somerton.

“ I am sure I need not bespeak your kindness for her. You and your Liliás are both too strictly conscientious to be otherwise than kind, and she has the qualities, I believe and hope, that will commend her to you.

“ You, my dear nephew, having beloved ones of your own, will scarcely wonder at my telling you, that the thought of leaving my child so completely orphaned, is the

heaviest and saddest I have in the immediate prospect of death. Shield her, I pray you, as much as in man lies, from aught that could harm either body or mind. Make her practically acquainted with business details, so that her young judgment may be exercised and strengthened. I should wish her to know all her people, that she may take a personal interest and care for them, when she goes to dwell amongst them.

“Much more have I to add, but——”

Abrupt was the conclusion. As our readers will conjecture, it was the letter Mr. Somers was writing, when that last, sudden, and overpowering death-spasm came.

“You see, gentlemen,” continued Mr. Walshe, “this is an exposition of Mr. Somers’s wishes in regard to Miss Somers; but, legally, it is worth nothing.”

“Such a document is binding on every honourable mind, legal or not legal, Sir,” put in Colonel Vallancey, abruptly, and eyeing the solicitor almost sternly.

“Exactly, Colonel Vallancey. Legal compulsion is not needful for the upright mind. But yet it is advisable that all should know what they are doing. Honesty in one man does not ensure it in another. There is no

option about the conditions of the will ; those must be fulfilled ; *these* are optional. Miss Somers may marry some one who will question the authority of the executors : they must be made safe in what they do."

"Your profession teaches you to be cautious, if not suspicious, Mr. Walshe," remarked Sir James Dysart, a fine, tall, aristocratic-looking person, and near blood relative of Mabel's deceased mother ; "pray, what is my niece's exact age ?"

"She will be seventeen in June."

"Ah, indeed ! she scarcely looks as much. I suppose, when propriety admits of it, you will give her a season or two in town ; not bury her in the country ?" said Sir James, with a glance at the two executors.

They looked at each other. Debonair was the Colonel's voice, as he replied, that "They had had no time at present either to mature, or even think over their plans, for the poor darling."

"The sole inheritress of so fine a property will doubtless marry into the peerage," continued Sir James. "I had thought it probable that there would be an enactment in the will, that her husband should take the name of Somers, in conjunction with his own."

We have no power to require, or enforce such a thing," replied Mr. Ferrand; "but perhaps, when Miss Somers marries, her husband may not be unwilling to take the name: it is a time-honoured one."

"I would make it a *sine qua non*. I do not like these old names dying out. I always looked to my deceased friend marrying again. The relatives of a first marriage rarely sanction or approve a second; but, in this case, as he had no sons, and lost my niece so soon, I saw no objection to it whatever; and, indeed, named the matter to him."

"He had unusual ideas upon this subject," said Colonel Vallancey; "there were cases, he thought, when it was decidedly advisable to contract a second marriage; but, generally speaking, he did not approve of them."

"There can be no doubt that marriage fetters a man's liberty," replied Sir James; "but when there is such an ancient name to be kept up, and splendid property to descend, it is a duty (at least, so I consider it), to have sons and daughters. To conduct yourself with consistent propriety to people whilst they live with you, is surely enough; common justice to yourself demands, that you should not be bound to their memory. These things

should be brought to the bar of reason, rather than that of feeling ; feeling inevitably leads us wrong."

Eminently handsome must Sir James Dysart have been in youth ; and there was still great symmetry of feature—beauty of outline. But was there that look in the clear, searching grey eye, and in the hard, almost inflexible curves stamped by time, about the mouth, which told of a hard, cold, proud nature—one most unlikely to be swayed by the uncertainties and fluctuations of passing feelings ; a man, likely to stand well with the world—to be looked up to as most strictly honourable, and respected accordingly, yet inspiring liking in few. Polished and refined his manner, yet had it no amenity ; no frankness of eye or smile gave force to courteous and well-chosen words—no sunny, open glance, gave insight to his own, or unlocked another's thoughts. Chilly, most immaculate, to him could you never go to make confession of a fault ; frozen on your lips would be the words, as by the breath of an arctic wind.

Far from being in the humour to be pleased, was Sir James, too haughty to acknowledge it, even to himself ; yet, did he feel it most tacitly disrespectful, that he, the head of the

family on the maternal side, should have no power whatever to influence or sway the destinies of the orphaned heiress of the Somers—wholly passed by, whilst Mr. Fer-rand, a young, and, in comparison with himself, an inexperienced man, had been asked to provide her a home.

“Some one told me that my niece was exceedingly lovely. I have not seen her, until now, for some time, and, I must confess, I am disappointed in her appearance,” was his next remark.

“The poor child is perfectly worn out by grief,” quickly, but suavely replied Colonel Vallancey; “she has lost all her smiles and fine rich colour, and looks still paler from her dismal mourning. But you must allow, Sir James, that her features are faultless?”

“Yes, they are very good, I grant; and like her mother’s, too: exceedingly do they resemble hers. But she is unlike *her* in looking spiritless and inanimate—so sallow, too.”

Had she been chiselled marble, instead of his flesh-and-blood kinswoman, Sir James could not have surveyed her with a more gelid look, or made a more critical examination of her appearance, than he had done, as she sat with downcast eyes—the long, dark eyelashes,

resting on her thin, pale cheek. Not once did she look up, but listened to her dead father's words, wherein her own name was so entwined, with ear and heart—with a pained, agonized spirit, but with a most resolute, enforced self-control. Now and then crept a sort of numbing spell over her, as if a pall, shutting out past and present, spread itself over her mind, leaving a vague, yet pleasant blank—or as if she were in a dream, dim and strange, where many actors were, but with whom she had nothing in common—looking on, merely. But the dim dreaminess passed, and the spell was broken, by a voice of quiet monotony, reading out; and again she was sitting there, in that library, where, for years, she had sat with *him*, in happy, cheerful converse; where, not a book, or cabinet, or single article about the room, but silently spoke of *him*: she was sitting there without him—an utter orphan. And where was he?

Sir James noted everything; nothing escaped the clear, cold gaze, which observed alike her hands of especial beauty, and the convulsive tremor of her lip, that once or twice defied her utmost power of self-command.

On the whole, he felt tolerably satisfied

with her personal appearance. She was elegantly proportioned and graceful, with the impress of refinement and high caste upon her.

Had Mabel Somers looked other than a lady, Sir James would not have endured her. As it was, she lacked something—air, manner, presence, were sadly deficient. But these were things in which it would, doubtless, be possible to improve her.

“Ah, she must have time to recover her looks,” put in the Colonel, blandly; “she does not at present seem to have a thought beyond the irreparable loss she and all of us have sustained. I never, certainly, saw such intense strength of affection as existed between Mabel and her father.”

“Of course, of course there would be,” replied Sir James, with a slight accent of impatience; “she has evidently not yet arrived at the age when ladies study their looks; and even in their deepest mourning mourn becomingly. She will be true to the instincts of her sex by-and-by.”

It was quite a relief to the two guardians when Sir James, with the other relatives, not personally interested, left the room, and them to their needful discussion with Mr. Walshe,

in the course of which, the latter gentleman remarked upon the singular coincidence of Mr. Somers hurrying on the making of his will, and the getting all his business and monetary transactions arranged during his last stay in London, and his death occurring so immediately, and so truly unexpectedly.

"It would almost make us believe," said the Colonel, "that there was some hidden presentiment on his mind relative to it."

"Just my own thought, Colonel Vallancey. I assure you, Mr. Somers held me to my appointments to the minute, though more than once I asked for a little delay, as we were at the time so excessively occupied with the case of *Cromer v. Cromer*. I thought, as our firm has conducted all the legal business of the Somers' family for so long a period—upwards of two hundred years—that I might take the liberty, but Mr. Somers would not permit or sanction even an hour's delay; indeed, he quite hurried me on. I thought it somewhat remarkable at the time, for he was looking in such perfect health."

"He *had* the presentiment you speak of," said Mr. Ferrand, gravely; "he mentions it in the letter he addressed to Miss Somers only

a few hours before his death ; she showed it to me last evening."

" Very strange and mysterious things are these presentiments," remarked the Colonel ; " we can understand them as little as we can doubt that they are."

" You will find all very straightforward, gentlemen," said Mr. Walshe ; " Mr. Somers was a man of strict order in all business concerns. There is one little matter which must take a different arrangement ; it is a note-of-hand from Widow Ashwell on the Crowhurst Farm, for money advanced to her. Now it was Mr. Somers's expressed intention, if the money was not repaid by the first of June, when it falls due, to destroy the note, so that there might be no legal claim upon her. She is the grandmother of a lot of orphan children, and is struggling to keep a home over their heads,—Mr. Somers, to my certain knowledge, helped her most liberally in many ways. Now, as the matter is not mentioned at all in the will, it must of course be viewed differently ; it will require referring to Miss Somers ; Mr. Somers's intention can be fulfilled only if she is willing to have it carried out."

" I should say that she will be most de-

sirous of following out her father's wishes in every respect," observed Mr. Ferrand.

It was arranged that Mr. Somers's letter of directions to Mr. Ferrand should be acted upon; that, till Mabel was twenty-one, her home should be at Beechwood, and, as soon as it was practicable, they would take her abroad, trusting that change and travel would restore her cheerfulness.

"Mind you," said the Colonel, "though her home is to be with you, I must have her a part of every year with my girls."

"Mabel shall do just as she pleases about that," replied Charles; "we shall look upon her as a sacred trust, to be cared for, and guarded in every way, both for her own sake and that of him who is gone."

"She will be an anxious and responsible charge," observed the Colonel.

"She will; her beauty, and her possessions together, are certain to make her so."

"Though, there is one consideration which must not be overlooked," said the Colonel, emphatically, "and that is, the blood flowing in her veins. Adrian Somers's daughter won't step aside from the right path; I have myself great faith in blood. It may be all nonsense, but I don't think so. I believe that more

than the sins of the parents descend upon the children. Mabel will make a superior woman. I don't say that she may, I say that she will do—I'm sure of it. Now, let us go and talk to the poor darling. By the way, I find I must not say anything sympathising, or I shall make the tears flow again; it made my heart ache to hear her sob so sadly."

CHAPTER XII.

" Let Grief be her own mistress still,
She loveth her own anguish deep
More than much pleasure. Let her will
Be done—to weep, or not to weep."

TENNYSON.

By the following week Mabel and Mrs. Abney were domiciled at Beechwood ; and Somerton was shut up, leaving only the house-keeper, Mrs. Godfrey, and a sufficient staff of servants, to keep mansion and ground in good order.

It was a marvel how Lillas got that *suite* of apartments appropriated to Mabel's and Mrs. Abney's use, so speedily refitted : entirely refurnished were they ; not a single article, either of use or ornament, left in which could, from any power of associations, call up a single memory of her former abiding in Mabel's mind.

Very prompt and energetic was Lillas when really interested ; and she had a fine clear head, and kind warm heart of her own ; and

she was determined not only to love Mabel, but to make Mabel love *her*. So she gave up some of her lightest, airiest, pleasantest rooms not only without regret, but with absolute pleasure, for their occupation. Fortunately, Beechwood House was spacious ; so no real inconvenience to the family resulted ; not that it would have made the slightest difference to Lillas, had it brought inconvenience with it.

Large, light, and studiously elegant was Mabel's drawing-room ; the windows, which commanded a wide view of hill and dale, opened out upon a sunny balcony, filled with greenhouse plants ; and about which the bright and fragrant summer flowers were trained and clustering. Standing on the balcony you looked down upon a gay sweep of leafy, glady, bowery garden, from whence rich scents were floating up to Mabel's windows from morn to night ; bright with graceful culture, with soft sloping banks of thickest greensward, with light alcoves, and arches of fanciful trellis-work reaching across and about it, was that fairy-like stretch of ground. Flower-baskets of the most picturesque forms, filled with vivid, glowing blooms, were dropped here and there, enamelling its surface ; along with odd quaint seats and chairs, of fanciful

devices, scattered up and down. In the centre rose a sparkling fountain, whose cool glittering waters fell into a large black-marble basin; there did the winged creatures delight to congregate, trim, and disport themselves. It was a most lovely picture of a garden; in its sweet shelter did the flowers bloom earliest and latest; mid its green arcades the sunlight love to linger, the moonlight sleep.

Throughout her whole arrangements, Lilius forgot nothing which could in any way contribute to Mabel's comfort, or make Beechwood seem to her a cheerful, pleasant home; on the vases and lavish ornaments were her initials; the crest and arms of the Somers were stamped upon the books littering marble stand and table; on the toilette apparatus of dressing-room and bedroom, the same. The ease and comfort and freedom of a home were to be perfectly preserved; yet was Mabel's distinctiveness, as the heiress of Somerton, to be preserved also—in no way was that to be lost sight of.

Deeply grateful was her young heart for so much care, and thoughtful, most delicate kindness. Yet time passed on, and she remained pale, silent, sad; her interest in life seemed to be lost, gone—joy that had had such a

quick, living spring in her fresh, bounding spirit, welled forth no more,—its fount was stopped. Yet, nor lessened, nor diminished, was the hot and quenchless thirst for streams that could never flow again—never again for her. Stilled was her despairing cry, but it had changed into a voiceless grief. No more was heard her ringing laugh; faint and sick the smile—mantling and dying again—that its place had taken.

Sparkling as a mountain-stream had been her daily life; up-springing and on-flowing its gushing happiness, to which all things had ministered, given food; her own thoughts being gladdest, gayest of all. Most sensitive had she been to pleasure: now she had become all-sensitive to pain. It seemed that the off-tearing of the tendrils which had bound her to her father, was well-nigh killing her.

Very sad, indeed, it was to see her. She was going on in all the common usage of the world once more, but as one from whom all elasticity of mind had fled. The book or needlework dropped from her nerveless hand into her lap, unnoted; the soft-lidded eyes drooped, fixed: and her face would wear the look of the most perfect abstraction from all that surrounded her.

Everything in nature, even, awakened painful echoes in her heart: the tinkling water, and rustling leaves, the voice of birds, and sighing winds, made her tears gush passionately, uncontrollably. *They* were the only outward evidence of that deep cankering grief (silent and wordless was it) which was throwing such deep shadow over her young life. She never spoke of her father, perhaps she could not; for her voice, when speaking on any subject, had a very low, sad accent with it. To the children she had become a mystery; gentle as possible with them, but giving no response to their joy—no longer joining in their play. She was no more the flower-gathering, garland-weaving, story-narrating, singing, laughing Mabel. They saw that she was very sad; and in their innocent prayers they asked God, who was so very good to us all, to make Cousin Mabel happy again!

Through the phases of that most fruitless sorrow, was Mabel watched by those around her with the deepest solicitude. Lilius was tireless in her sympathy, often sitting with her arms round her, talking to her in the gentlest tones, whispering words of most sisterly tenderness, accompanied by looks and caresses of most sisterly love. None but

herself heard those low-breathed, mournful accents.

"Father—my father!" as the sorrowful girl's head lay on her bosom.

The children had one day been taking their favourite ramble to the Fern Lane, and on their return came as usual to pour their flower treasures into Mabel's lap, that she might tell their names. Mechanically she took them up to do so; but her glance fell upon one amongst them, and instantly were they all on the carpet; whilst Mabel herself, with streaming tears and an agonized countenance, rose hastily, and left the room.

Lilias was sitting near, and saw the action; she stooped down to examine the flowers, and saw at once the cause of the sudden emotion. She held up a bright-blue flower, the larger "Forget-me-not," and called the wondering children to her, to tell them to notice its colour and form, so that they might always know it, and never bring it into the house again, on pain of making her very angry indeed.

Angrily she spoke, and the little Ethelle and Maud looked quite aghast.

"There, take them all away, instantly, and never gather this one again, it makes Mabel weep when she sees it."

So saying, she was leaving the room to follow Mabel, when Mrs. Abney stopped her.

"I almost wish, dear Lillas, that you would not go to Mabel; I am afraid all this sympathising only fosters her depression and low spirits. It is very sad to see her give way so much. Don't you think she would get over it sooner if we did not notice it at all?"

"No, Aunt Abney, I do not think so," replied Lillas, eagerly; "to me it seems that it would not only be wrong, but positively inhuman. Mabel cannot speak about her grief, shuts it up, and it is very bad for her. I think her tears do her good,—I want her to lay it open, talk about it, instead of hiding it in her heart's core,—I am quite sure that my plan is the right one. Besides, if ever there was a holy grief, or one that deserved to be met with every kind and Christian sympathy, it is Mabel Somers's. I should be worse than an infidel to turn coldly from her now, when any one may see that her heart aches till she does not know what to do with herself. Charles was in the room, and he looked up from his book; he could tell from Lillas' tones that she was excited. He shook his head at her as he noticed her flashing eyes and heightened colour.

"Oh, you warm-tempered Lily, (tiger-lily, if any at all), what are you and our good *tante* quarrelling about?"

"We are not quarrelling at all," replied Mrs. Abney, with the most perfect equanimity, "we only do not quite agree about Mabel. It is very distressing to see her still so dejected; and I am very anxious to know the best way of proceeding with her. I sometimes fear that we do her harm rather than good, by so much watching and soothing, and that if we took no notice, but left it to wear itself out, it might be better for her. What do you think, Charles?"

"Nay, I must not be guilty of so much presumption as to give a decisive opinion when two ladies disagree; but I incline, to speak candidly, more to my wife's view of the matter than yours; on this ground, a thing that is not dead should not be buried; and poor Mabel's grief is, I fear, quick enough at present. Remember what *he* says to whom the human heart lay open as a book—

'Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break.'

Now, I trust there is but small danger of any heartbreak in the present instance; but if Mabel *could* be won to lay open her feelings

more, I think it would be likely to aid in restoring her cheerfulness, (talking is a great safety-valve, you may rely upon it, Mrs. Abney); and this deep reserve is so unlike her usual ingenuousness and frankness—so foreign to her character, that one does not know what to make of it, quite. But suppose we refer the knotty question to Dr. Merridan—he is a very knowledgeable person—and as regards Mabel, warmly interested. I should attach great weight to his judgment.”

Mrs. Abney had no objection to refer the matter to the Doctor, and be guided by him; for she was quite sure he would agree with *her* view of it. Lilius was also well content, for she was very certain—she whispered Charles—the Doctor would say, he coincided with *her*.

An opportunity was soon given; that very day he drove over to Beechwood. A restlessness had come over the Doctor since Mr. Somers's death; his life seemed to be jarred; his mind out of tune, his habits broken up, (even his microscope had lost its power to interest him); and his temper had surely grown more petulant, for he became quite querulous and cross, when consulted about Mabel's total lack of spirits and cheerfulness.

“You are all of you so impatient!” he

exclaimed. "I wonder you do not better understand the regulating laws of our common nature. What is it you expect or look for? If she had had a fever, do you think she would rise up again straight away, her feet walk—her hands handle—or her spirits grow buoyant and lively all at once? Or, if she had had a limb wrenched off in a sudden moment, do you suppose she could forget it, or do without it—or be as alert or self-helpful as she was before? Don't you think it more likely that she would always be craving and wanting its help, and feeling that she had lost far more than she had retained? Should you—any one of you—expect her to jump and skip immediately? Could *you*, Mrs. Abney, have the conscience to ask her to get up and dance the polka the next day or the next week?"

"Certainly not, Doctor."

"Then why do you expect her to be frolicking about now, eh? Here, you are all disheartened by finding that she no longer laughs and sings, when she has gone through that which is, to her mind, what consuming fever would be to her body. She is sick with sore heart-sickness; she is fevered and parched for lack of a voice and smile which can never come to her again, save perhaps in dreams. She is

haunted with phantoms of the past ; she lives in it—doesn't care a straw for the present—it's nothing—but looks back always to see him she cannot see ; and listen for *his* step which she cannot hear, and pines for. Could you read her soul, you'd find it written all over with yearning prayers for him to come ; to come back to her ; she tells him nothing less than that *can* quiet her. But this she doesn't tell *you* ; for why, because she knows you couldn't enter into it with her, and she would rather keep it all to herself—have nobody meddling with her grief—be let alone to indulge it ; and why not ? Let her alone, say I. We cannot apply tonics and remedies to the mind as we do to the body ; but people don't understand this, and they want to drill it, and make it obedient, and fetch and carry, and do this, and not do the other ; and what does it show ? Why it shows monstrous ignorance, Mr. Ferrand ; dense, stolid ignorance, Mrs. Abney. The mind is not, and never was, intended to be a machine—to be sounded by plummet and line—to be worked by pulleys and wheels—to be rasped and filed—to be shaped, and planed, and smoothed. The man is yet to come, and a cunning workman he

will be, who can fashion and model that to his liking.

“ Never fear, Mrs. Abney, nor you either, Mrs. Ferrand, but Miss Somers will come round again. There are a thousand healing influences, all silent and unseen, at work for the benefit of the sick in mind : these you have no power to help or hinder : let them work their own work. For the rest, she has youth, health, and everything life can offer, straight before her. She will rise up from this lethargic state : it will be neither to-day nor to-morrow ; but she will be all right again. Time, patience, gentleness, and total change of scene, (to get her thoughts into a different channel, divert the current,) are the only things to be prescribed ; and she will respond to them. The void will be filled up, the blank peopled again. The very fact of her being cared for in every particular, requiring no self-thought whatever for the morrow, is against her. If she had to exert herself to earn her daily bread, it would be far better for her, as regards getting back her cheerfulness ; but even as it is, you need none of you fear. Time cannot work miracles ; but it can and does work wonders. Miss Somers will be blooming again in a few months.”

"Then, Doctor, your advice is—" said Lillas.

"To do nothing," interrupted the Doctor. "Simple enough advice; but difficult enough for anxious friends to follow."

So saying, he rose up, and abruptly closed the conversation by quitting the room.

As the door shut after him, Charles, with an amused expression of face, asked which of them the Doctor had paired off with.

"With me," returned Lillas promptly.

"No, Lillas, I am sure it was with me," exclaimed Mrs. Abney. "Did he not say—"

A hearty laugh from Charles broke in upon what she was about to utter: in his opinion, they were as wise as before,—neither more nor less.

The Doctor, on leaving them, made his way to Mabel's drawing-room, where he seated himself, and proceeded to talk cheerfully to her upon all sorts of indifferent subjects. She at length began to question him about John Collins, whose illness had greatly increased.

It had struck the Doctor, and, indeed, all of them, as a singular circumstance, that Mabel should take such a constant interest in this man: not a day passed without her speaking of him, and desiring to know how he was

going on. Imperative had been her orders that he should lack nothing; that every comfort a sick person could need, every alleviation which human skill could devise for the relief of human suffering, should be afforded to him. Several times, by her express desire, had Mrs. Abney gone over to Somerton to see him, and learn whether Mabel's orders were carried out in every jot and tittle with respect to him.

Hopelessly ill was the poor man, said the Doctor: medicine could be of very little service to him; he was wasting away fast in consumption, and past all cure.

Particular grew Mabel's inquiries: was there nothing more that could be procured to add to his comfort, or ease his sufferings? nothing that would be suggested to an individual in affluent circumstances, similarly situated?

The Doctor did not know that there was: no one could have been better cared for than John Collins throughout the whole period of his illness. If there was any one thing that could make him more comfortable than he was, it would be one of the water-beds. His back was getting painful with much lying: one of these would certainly diminish suffering; but they were expensive things.

"Never mind the expense," replied Mabel, eagerly: "will you oblige me by procuring one without delay. Send a special messenger to town for it at once; and, as you see the poor man so often, will you kindly tell him that I shall not leave England without seeing him."

The Doctor said he would do both one and the other, then hummed a little to himself, and stared fixedly at Mabel from under his spectacles.

"Miss Mabel," he at length commenced, "I should like to know why you take such deep interest in this man. You are kind to all, I know, sick or well; but John Collins seems quite to occupy your mind. I confess to being curious about it."

Agitated grew Mabel, and tremulous became her lips.

"Not now, not now, Doctor: some other time I will tell you.—And yet, you were *his* dear, good friend.—'Twas the last time I walked with him,—the very last—last time I hung upon *his* arm—that we met this man, Collins—and he—*he* told him that he should be cared for—he, and all belonging to him."

Outpoured were the words, as though she distrusted her power to articulate to the end,

and then her face was buried in the satin cushion of the couch on which she was sitting.

"I see, I see," replied the Doctor. "Don't weep so sadly, Miss Mabel, or I shall reproach myself with putting the question to you."

"It comforts me to weep. I feel that I could weep my life away," was the sad rejoinder.

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind. You must live a long life—live to be a comfort to us all, and to do honour to your dear father's training. Do you know there was a time when *I* talked as you do now—when I well-nigh died of grief and disappointment? I think I *should* have done, save for him whom you and I both mourn, though in a different fashion. Yes: he first saved my life, and then my reason. I'd got a fiery arrow in my heart, and he helped me pluck it out. You have never known of this; but I will tell you all about it, some day. You would not have supposed now, should you, that such a quiet, tamed-down, middle-aged gentleman as myself had passed through such a furnace of affliction, and lived to smile at it? But let us talk no more about these things. I want a game at chess, to rest my mind; I'm all unhinged. What say you

to one, Miss Mabel? shall we do our best to circumvent each other?"

They sat down to play; and Mabel got interested in her game, and when the Doctor made a rash, unguarded move, checkmated him in capital style. He stared with such mingled astonishment and crabbedness at finding himself wholly without a move, that Mabel laughed right out.

In the course of another week, every arrangement was made for the Beechwood party leaving England for the Continent. On the day but one before they left, Mabel drove to Somerton to see John Collins.

A picturesque, roomy, very comfortable looking cottage was that in which John lived; its walls and roof covered with an embowering vine: round the very chimneys did it go, in trim and trained luxuriance of leaf, and waving tendril, and clustering fruit. The neat-cut, neat-kept flower-beds of the old-fashioned garden; the fulness of the mossy, mellow orchard, under whose gnarled and knotted trees ranged goodly rows of bee-hives, testified to thriftiness and good management in the poor man's house.

John's wife was busy cleaning when Mabel's light carriage stopped at the door, and her face

flushed crimson as she made her curtsy to her visitor. "She did not like to be caught in her untidiness," she said, "but John couldn't deal with any noise now, so she opportuned herself to get her work done when he was sitting out in the orchard; then, he wasn't disturbed with it."

A pattern of housewifely industry she looked, as she stepped nimbly about in her clicking pattens; her neat print gown was drawn up through her pocket-hole, while it was protected in front by a linsey apron whose bib reached up to her throat; her white cap-strings were pinned over her head, whilst the pure muslin cap itself encompassed a face both comely and honest-looking, though now sorely overshadowed by trouble.

"Work must be done," she said, "let people be in what trouble they might;" and the sigh rose, and the tear started, as she spoke.

A chair was carried to the orchard, that Mabel might go and sit by the sick man, who was looking most wan and deathlike. Disease had made rapid strides with him; his hand had grown white, and shook, his lip trembled when he spoke; and he kept raising his handkerchief to wipe the damp cold dews from off his forehead. The unmistakeable wasting of consump-

tion was upon his erewhile robust, athletic frame, its blanching on his cheek.

His eldest daughter, Ruth, a pretty, blooming, gentle-mannered girl of fifteen, was reading to him. The two were seated under a large-limbed pear-tree, whose leafy boughs screened them from the noontide fervour of the mid-summer sun. Sad and startling was the contrast between the clear, healthy look, and round expanding form of the daughter, and the shrunk figure, sharply-outlined face of the father, white as the pillows on which it was thrown back.

The sick man feebly essayed to rise, as Mabel, deeply shocked at his changed appearance, approached him ; but she bade him keep still. She had come to call upon him and see for herself how he was going on.

“ But you need not close your Bible, Ruth, because I am come : where are you reading ? ”

Ruth showed her ; and Mabel took it, and read to the conclusion of the chapter : her voice instinctively toning itself to softest accent, to suit the nice ear of a sick and feeble man. As she put it down and turned to speak to him, he said—

“ My Bible and I are fast friends now, Miss Somers, I wish I had taken it to my

heart sooner ; but, late as it is—the eleventh hour—I am not afraid to die. Man is sinful; but God is merciful. I find I have a deal to repent of—little sins as well as great ones ; and I do repent me of them all.”

“ His faults and his wife’s too,” he added. “ Yes, Mary had it as well as he, was too much striving and pains-taking for the morrow. He could see it all now—they should not have striven less, but they should have trusted God more. He saw that they wanted teaching, so He had called him away in the prime of his days—he was but forty-four. It was young to lay by work when seven children had to be fed and provided for — but young or not, he was dying. He saw the green grapes on the vine; but his eyes would be shut and dark when the purple bloom had gathered on them.

“ Proud had they been—too proud, of having a good name, and of their children being steady and well-behaved ; it *was* a good thing. Their people before them, both his own and Mary’s people, had borne good names, and he prayed night and day—day and night he prayed that those who came after them might do the same. He could not die in peace, if he thought they would go wrong.”

And spite of that hollow churchyard cough, which seems to deprive him of all the little remaining strength he possesses, he talks on; faint and exhausted is his voice, but he talks on; he *must* talk; and his wasted face grows eager, and his eye lights up with more than feverish anxiety; for his speech is of his wife and seven children, Ruth, the bright-eyed girl beside him, watching him with such a weeping gaze, being the oldest of them. What are they to do? What is to become of them, when left without a breadwinner?—they must go upon the parish, for they cannot starve. But, oh! the disgrace of *that*; it is a millstone round his neck.

And Mary, John's wife—now looking the perfection of neatness, in a clean gown and net handkerchief and cap—comes and stands beside her husband, and takes one of his white, bony hands in hers; feebly do his fingers close upon it, and he gazes at her with much sober affection as he talks.

But his spent, hollow tones cease at last; all he has to say, he has said; wholly he has unburdened his heart: and now another voice is heard, 'tis Mabel's turn to speak. What is it *she* is saying?

Something which brings the tears with a

sudden rush to the eyes of him who is listening with such intent ear. Nay, they are coursing down his face—falling faster and faster are those large tears.

And when she rises up to go, the dying man's look turns upon her with a dying man's blessing written in it; and he gasps out yet a few more words, telling, that he should pass away full of thankfulness; and his head sinks on his wife's bosom and he bids her have no more fear. "For the Somers's never forget their promises."

Mrs. Abney called for Mabel at the cottage; she had herself been to the hall, where Mabel durst as yet by no means go; and they walked up the village together to make a farewell call upon Mr. and Mrs. Geary at the Rectory. There was a general mustering at the doors to see the two ladies pass, and to offer respectfully cordial salutations to them. Many were the comments made upon their young lady's pale face, altered appearance, and also upon her looking older.

She did look older. The sweet childhood that had lingered about her so long, as though loth to depart, had now entirely left her; the sharp piercing grief which had so suddenly fallen upon her, had given both mental and

physical maturity. No longer child, or girl, but

“ A being breathing thoughtful breath.”

Little else was talked of in Somerton that evening, but Mabel's gracious words and promises to John Collins ; and also, that she had said, “ she should come amongst her people very much—visit them regularly and constantly, when she returned from abroad.”

Many were there to prophecy, that she would be a true Somers—almost as good as her father.

Mrs. Geary rose from her *fauteuil*—where she looked well-nigh impacted—to greet her visitors with eager warmth and cordiality.

“ How rejoiced and happy I am to see you both,” she said, kissing Mabel most affectionately, “ we should have driven to Beechwood this evening to say ‘ Good-bye,’ but for this kind call. Now sit down and tell me all about yourself, my dear love ?”

And retaining the hand she had grasped, she drew Mabel down into a chair beside her own.

“ We do so often speak about you—scarce an hour in the day but your name is on our lips. I trust you are getting better now ; recovering

your spirits? Well, well; we will not talk about it, I see it is too great a trial for you. And which day do you go? We could give you some pleasant introductions. Two of our married daughters are in Germany just now. Dora is at Ems with her husband, who is not quite well. Then we have many friends at Munich, and Strasburg also."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Abney, "we are not wishing introductions, as we shall not stay in any place, but rather hurry on."

"Oh! I wouldn't hurry over it. I myself can see no use in bustling about what we do; it makes life *so* uncomfortable," was Mrs. Geary's smiling response as she looked from one to the other.

Very pleasing and prepossessing was the face, either with or without the smile; so kind, so altogether placid and serene was its expression. She was a little older than dear Mr. Geary, she told everybody; yet was her complexion still beautifully soft and smooth; her hair of silvery whiteness, was shown softly braided over her peaceful, and yet unwrinkled brow—a fit and nice adornment. The rich black satin dress she wore, with the accompanying lace cap, and collar, and apron, became her exceedingly. In every hue and

lineament you saw the gentlewoman. None could help noting the extreme beauty of her hands; so plump and white, and finely moulded were they; the fingers covered with costly rings.

With a smile she would tell of her girlish vanity about her beautiful hands, and how one of our greatest sculptors had sought an introduction to her, from casually seeing one of them uplifted to her brow, on some public occasion.

Wholly in harmony with her looks, was her low-pitched gentle voice; such a round, lulling sort of articulation had her words, as they flowed forth, that by a curious sort of analogy, you were irresistibly reminded of a soft down cushion. Very useful in their day and generation, and pleasant to live with, are these cushiony people; nothing puts them out of their way, nothing irritates: no bur, or briar, or bramble lies in *their* path; clings to their garments—no nettle stings them. Rest and peace are written on their foreheads—Quiet is the text of their whole life—Tumult, the only enemy they dread. To all the rubs and ills that flesh is heir to, to every shaft in the quiver, do they present their downiness; and though, maybe, for the instant, impressed, yet

do they rise up again without a crease, or fold, or wound, to mark the spot.

If Mrs. Geary represented the Passive principle, Mr. Geary, whom we have before presented to our reader, was as faithful to the Active. Nothing drowsy and somnolent was there about him : you read in his glowing eye, quick speech, and still alert step, the tokens of a naturally vivacious and able mind, of one who liked to be doing, whose happiness would lie in it.

Yet unlike though they were in mind and character, beautifully in unison were they in benevolence of feeling, in rejoicing to do good, in the striving to promote the well-being of all within the sphere of their influence, in searching out occasions to make others happy.

The perfection of soft and silken luxuriousness was their abode ; carpeted till not a foot-fall could be heard ; curtained and cushioned till angles were scarce to be found. Easy-chair, and couch, and ottoman were of the most approved form and pattern for assured comfort and ease. Fat dogs and sleek cats lay lovingly together upon the rugs ; their wants so amply supplied, that nothing could they find to quarrel about. Birds were too noisy for such a peaceful establishment, all save one

gorgeous hyacinthine macaw, which, the gift of a deceased friend, hung up in her gilded cage, in the spacious hall, and chattered and shrieked incessantly; now and then disturbing the calm, even balance of Mrs. Geary's equanimity so effectually, that a reluctant order was issued to her maid, "to chide Gabrielle," whereupon an expressive pantomime of reproving, frowning, and head-shaking was gone through; threats of banishment, and withdrawal of dainties uttered, at which Gabrielle stared and clamoured with all her might.

Her painful duty performed, Mrs. Geary gravitated into composure again; and Gabrielle went frantically on. But for that one noisy creature, the house would have seemed a veritable sleepy hollow, so quiet, slumbrous again was its atmosphere; the doors closed noiselessly, the bells were all modulated in tone—voices were never raised; the servants, fat, comfortable-looking creatures they were, seemed always shod in velvet; the work done without sounds thence proceeding or accompanying; so pervading was the spirit of repose over all and everything.

The Rector, himself, laughed at their carriage horses, their easy-going, their steady, composed deportment, and their marvellous

roundness ; such a sleek, glossy-coated pair were not to be found in all the country round.

The kind Rector assured Mabel he should take every care of her people during her absence, which, whether it was longer or shorter, he trusted would be extended till the roses were blooming in her cheeks again ; those returned, right welcome home would the lady of Somerton be.

"I dare say you would like to see our little grandchildren," said Mrs. Geary ; "their mamma has entrusted three of them to us, whilst she is abroad."

Their *bonne* brought them in from the grounds ; two little, fair, flaxen-haired things, in white frocks and muslin bonnets ; and standing composedly beside them, a little bold-eyed, manly brother, who soon whispered Mabel, that he meant to be a soldier, and fight bravely for the Queen ; he should soon be a man—he could ride a pony now, and he meant to take great care of his mamma and sisters, and not allow any one to offend them. And there stole up on the other side one of the little *blonde* pets, to tell about a beautiful large waxen doll, that opened and shut its eyes, but which Willie did not like ; he said, "dolls were fit only for girls and babies ; that

if he had one, it must be a soldier doll dressed in scarlet uniform, with a hat and feather; and sword and pistol by his side."

A considerable time did they sit conversing with the kindly pair, and when they at length rose, Mrs. Geary kissed Mabel again, and bade her "take the greatest possible care of herself, for her life was indeed very precious to them all."

And the venerable rector smiled benignantly as he said, "He was sure the blessing of an old man, like him, could never come amiss to her." So he raised his hands, and she bent her head; whilst, with a deeply serious voice he blessed her, praying the Lord God to be with her at all times, and in all places, preserving her in safety, and giving her a peaceful and happy mind."

Not another word was spoken; and they passed out.—But there was yet business for Mabel to transact before she left England.

The time had passed by when the money lent to the Widow Ashwell, of the Crowhurst Farm, ought to have been repaid, but repaid it had not been. A sorely troubled heart did the widow carry about with her. Heavy and desponding she went to her bed; heavy and desponding she rose in the morn.

"If it were but *he* who lent it to me that I had to deal with, I should have no fear; he would give me time, I know; but executors are so hard. What shall I do—what shall I do?"

She was expecting, fearing the worst, when she received a written intimation to appear at Beechwood on a certain day. "It has come at last, children, and as I expected; you'll have no roof to shelter you in sun or frost," she exclaimed with something of the energy of despair. "We must turn out; I've risen up early, and late taken rest, to keep off the day, but it is of no use; I'm tired of struggling, and will struggle no longer."

She was at Beechwood at the appointed time. The homely woman was weeping sorely, and sick and faint with fear; every instant expecting the door to open and give entrance to either the agent, Gretton, or one of those dreaded executors. It did open at length, but it was to admit a pale, slight, subdued-looking young girl, clad in the deepest mourning. Sweet and beaming was the smile on the pale face, as she greeted the widow with gentlest courtesy.

She had felt sure she could not speak, had the widow; but now a very torrent of words

found way. Not entreaties, not asking for pity, nor yet for delay, but telling of how she had toiled for five orphan grandchildren, not one of them able to win the bread they must have or die. Her crops had failed ; her hay had been swept off by a flood ; her cattle had died,—God was against her, she was sure. There was a lull at last ; she was fairly out of breath ; and Mabel put a paper into her hand,—the widow's note for the money, and said, in the kindest voice,—

“ We have no longer any claim upon you, Mrs. Ashwell.”

The first look of unbelief was followed by a few broken sentences of gratitude ; but all her volubility was gone.

“ You owe me no thanks whatever. It was my dear father's intention to return this paper to you. I only fulfil his wishes.”

And, seeing how painfully full the widow's heart was, Mabel began to make inquiry about all these orphaned grandchildren, and soon got the whole history—a sad one it was—of their bereavement. Patiently she inquired into all the facts ; gained a clear view of its necessities ; and then she said some plan must be devised for her assistance ; she *must* need

it, and she *must* have it. Mrs. Ashwell might depend on her not forgetting her.

—"Never did I hear anything so pitying as her voice, or see such a pleasant, heartsome smile," said the widow, when afterwards speaking of her interview with Mabel.

The children were going away to their grandmamma Earle, to remain during the absence of the family; the two frolicsome young aunts having specially charged themselves with the care of them. Laughing Mary vowed that she would make the blue-eyed Maud quite a little *dandizette* ere she got out of her hands again.

Dr. Merridan crossed to Boulogne with the party, and there said Good-bye, he and Mabel first indulging in a long private conversation. Readily she promised what he earnestly requested, that, did she find her health failing in the least, she would send for him at once. He would cheerfully go all over the world to serve Adrian Somers's daughter, he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Time, that aged nurse,
Rock'd her to patience."

KEATS.

CANST thou show the pathway of the ship in the mighty waves—or the track of the arrow in the air—or the course of the bird in her flight? Canst thou grasp the shadow, or show the image of a voice?

Neither can it be shown how peace, the halcyon, comes back to the human mind. Neither can it be seen how the mind, well-nigh distraught with grief; or worse, buried in its dulness and its apathy, regains elasticity—recovers poise and balance.

This we do know, that Time beareth on his wings balsamic healings; that to such a state the seasons speak spiritual discourses; the sun, the moon, the stars have voices; the winds of heaven utter comfortable words.

It was now approaching the end of September, and the Beechwood party were on their homeward way; long had they been

lingering in the Tyrol, following no beaten track of travel, but staying or journeying on, just as they felt most inclined to do.

The object was accomplished for which they had set out; the desired end answered.

Mabel's step was again light and free, her cheek blooming, her eye raised and radiant once more; not now sadly seeking the earth, as it so long had been. She and the present were reconciled; the nascent spirit had outgrown the o'erwhelming sorrow.

Was she forgetting him without whom she had not had being, and in whom she had hitherto lived? No, she was not forgetting. Cease her fond longing for his presence could she never. Death had set the ineffaceable seal to her love for him: and it was locked up in her heart, as her most precious possession. To the heavens where he was, did her thoughts go forth; they would be her home, too, did she faithfully fulfil her duties. Yes, when she was meet for it, she would be with him, again.

From the embers of that sorrow was kindled the loftiest hope; not bounded by earth and time, but lifted up and immortal. And for the great love she had, and would for ever bear the dead, wondrous alchemic power

had it to make her love the living. Her heart burned within her when she thought of all the good she might do, all the suffering she might alleviate.

She was rich, the poor then must be her charge; deeds of love to her kind, her mission. So, she was prepared to take her place in life, and fill it.

Around the past was shed the brightest radiance, golden light pervaded it; joy-memories there were gathered, filled it; hers they were, hers would they ever be; none could take them from her.

And for the present, happiness sat at the gate. The air breathed peace, and not sorrow. Hope had raised itself from the dust, had budded, blossomed, and was scattering flowers and flower-tints on the path of the future.

Her keen perception of the beautiful gave her the vividest enjoyment of the magnificent scenery through which they had travelled. It was wonderful picture-land to her.

The aspect of the outer world was indeed glorious, kindled up as it was into marvellous beauty, by the early autumn splendours of hue and dye upon hill and valley. Her eye drank in delight, delights born of the sun-beam, the wave; the shadows resting on the

mountains, the winds sweeping o'er the plains—and a charmed draught, and cup of blessing to her mind, it proved.

True, there came bursts of quick passionate tears, at times; wrestlings and strugglings of grief that would not be denied; but she was no longer shut up in it. She had learned to believe that she *could* be happy again, that she ought to be. And she could smile, even through her glittering tears, and lift her entranced glance upon any memorable scene ere *they* were dry upon her cheek.

Yes, the hills and valleys basked in smiling gladness—the waters murmured pleasantly—the silvery, dreaming clouds in the rich blue heavens were filled with happy light—the breezes sported softly—the leaves fluttered and played—trees gaily bent and bowed,—*almost as they had wont to do*, to that young open-eyed disciple of nature.

A pleasantly assorted party were they: Mr. and Mrs. Ferrand, both young and enthusiastic; Mabel, in her greatest subduedness, ever thrusting aside self, thoughtful and considerate for others; and Mrs. Abney, serving as a judicious weight and balance, to prevent undue fatigue, imprudent rashness, and exposure.

One malcontent amongst them was there, in

the person of Griffiths, Mabel's *femme de chambre*, who, seeming usually to possess an average amount of sense and conduct, became utterly intractable, absurd, *une misérable*, as soon as she crossed the Channel; a mere bundle of prejudices, a teasel on the highway of life, a sort of human porcupine, horrified by unusual customs, martyred by trifling inconveniences, for ever quarrelling with the accommodations, reviling the dress, manners, complaining unceasingly of the beds, cookery, and bad roads, and occasionally asserting that the people did not understand their own language, when they failed to comprehend the polyglot sort of speech she indulged in. Daily thanking her stars that she was an Englishwoman, (intense did her nationalism become,) scornfully looking down from that lofty height, and applying the same contemptuous phrase to the people of ornate Munich, or gay, pleasure-loving Paris, as to those lost in the depths of the Tyrol; all "were poor, ignorant natives" alike. A fresh *migraine* did she seem to get for every day in the week; and often did she come under Mr. Ferrand's ban, who, when he did not laugh at her freaks, anathematised them with considerable energy and vivacity.

It was in the afternoon of a fine and mellow

autumn day that the *calèche* containing the Beechwood party, drove into the ancient city of Trent, and stopped at the "Albergo Reale," where they intended remaining some days, to afford time for the examination of the many places and objects of interest in the surrounding neighbourhood.

A group of gentlemen—travellers, evidently, like themselves—was standing, carelessly conversing, gathered about the principal entrance of the Albergo.

"There is an English look about those people," said Mr. Ferrand, as he handed his companions out of the carriage.

Respectfully all moved aside, to allow the ladies to pass in, courteously raising their hats as they did so. Griffiths, carrying some shawls, was the last of the party, save Mr. Ferrand, who was stopping to give some directions to the courier.

Suddenly a loud scream was heard, followed by another, and the luckless Griffiths was seen confronted by an enormous dog of the St. Bernard's breed; raising himself up, and deliberately resting his huge paws on her shoulders, the grave-looking animal was staring in her face with the immovableness of an inquisitor.

"Down, sir—down, sir," came from a dozen

different voices at once ; and the gentleman to whom he belonged, one of the group at the door, stepped forward, his face dyed crimson, to compel the dog to retreat from the affrighted abigail, who seemed sinking to the ground with terror.

“ Down, Jerome, this moment—he will not hurt you,—*will* you come down, sir?—do not be alarmed, he is quite gentle.”

Slowly the great, solemn-eyed creature removed himself, apparently satisfied with the earnest examination he had made ; his owner was lavish in his apologies, both to Griffiths, and to Mr. Ferrand, who, coming up to her assistance, had been seized with an irrepressible inclination to laugh—as had most of the others—at the truly ludicrous scene.

The little incident completed the measure of Griffiths’ disgust ; she should *never* over-get the shock, she affirmed, and lapsed into hysterics immediately. An hour or two passed, and as she was not better, Lillas sent for a physician, who, on his arrival, proved to be an Italian, without any knowledge whatever of English, so Lillas had to act the part of interpreter to place them *en rapport* to each other. Almost choked with suppressed laughter was she as she fulfilled her office ; for the

doctor gesticulated violently, and talked in such energetic dumb-show to Griffiths, that she became dreadfully alarmed, believing him to be a bandit in disguise,—and, the picture of ruefulness, implored Lillas to send him instantly away, or she would see her die of fright.

Fortunately the doctor set it all down to the strength of the hysteric passion.

Whilst at dinner, a card bearing the name of Lord George Farrel, was sent in with a polite message of inquiry, as to whether the *femme de chambre* had got the better of her alarm?

“I must go and tell Griffiths of Lord Farrel’s civility,” said Mabel, when they rose from table. Up, and much better she found her; the fear of another visit from the Italian medico had wonderfully restored her. His lordship’s politeness was some little set-off against the multiplied aggravations of the day, to the unlucky hand-maiden.

When the sweet-toned bells had ceased calling to Ave Maria, they strolled out to see the cathedral and the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. Whilst pacing the marble aisles of the latter, and delightedly listening to the fine music pouring out from rich voices, and rare

organ tones, they again encountered the same party which had been standing at the door of the Albergo, when they drove up.

Most particular had the Ferrands become about the society they received, or the acquaintances they made, since Mabel had been placed under their charge; so they were passing the party with a quiet bow—though the smile on the face of all, showed that the ludicrous scene they had mutually witnessed, was fresh in mind—when one of them, a young man of some three or four and twenty, and of very gentlemanly exterior, stepped forward, and in an unusually pleasant, manly voice, said,—

“I think I can scarcely be mistaken in addressing you as Mr. Ferrand of Beechwood?”

Charles bowed, and after a half minute’s scrutinising gaze, replied,

“And you, if I am not mistaken, are the Hon. Wymonde Barry?”

“I am;”—cordially the two gentlemen shook hands. “I felt sure,” said Mr. Barry with a particularly frank and winning smile, “that I *ought* to know you when I saw you alight from your carriage, still I could not quite recal when and where I had previously met you; had I remained in doubt, I should probably

have done so un-English a thing, as sent my card to your apartments, and requested the honour of yours in return."

They stood conversing for some little time on the usual travellers' topics, from whence they had come, whither they were bound. Something so singularly pleasing and gentleman-like was there in Mr. Barry's address, that Charles was induced to present him to his lady companions—a sufficient signal to Liliás that she might relax from that quiet, reserved deportment—so alien to her nature—but the necessity for which Charles was constantly impressing upon her on Mabel's account. Liliás's gay, lively manners, made her usually a very approachable person, and really difficult it was for her to assume a chilly demeanour; but on this point Charles was not to be gainsayed, so she pouted her ruby lip, and "put on stilts," as she satirically termed it.

Well known by repute to them all was Mr. Barry, as one of the members for the county of D——e; indeed Mr. Ferrand had been on his committee during the contested election. *Young* man though he was, yet had he acquired reputation, and was both thought and spoken highly of—his maiden speech in the House had attracted much attention by its talent and

vigour, and it was of general belief that a distinguished future lay before him.

After a courteous acknowledgment of the introduction and a smiling inquiry after Griffiths, he placed himself beside Lillas, with whom he kept up an animated conversation. She soon felt prepossessed, his manner was so easy and unpretending, yet assured, the demeanour of one who had always known his position and kept it; spirited and intelligent was his conversation, with ready, graceful elocution. The face was manly, scarcely perhaps to be called handsome, yet far enough from being plain; indeed the mouth was beautiful—might have been modelled from the antique Greek, so fine and classic was it in its curve and outline; dark and expressive were the eyes; winning the smile. None would require to look twice to tell that he was not one to falter, or be unstable in his purpose; that begun, 'twould be pursued till won, if won it *could* be: decision was written in his glances—aye, even in the smile; with both lip and eye softening under its power, you still read of the prompt and energetic mind. His figure was good, flexible and thoroughly well proportioned, his step active and free. The whole contour and appearance gave the im-

pression of natural and instinctive refinement, as well as that of high breeding.

When the sweet and solemn music ceased, they left the church, intending to explore the city a little; and Mr. Barry, after speaking a few words to his own party of friends, accompanied them. It was a gay holiday in Trent, and the promenades were crowded with elegant looking women, unbonnetted, and most tastefully attired. Slowly did our party saunter about, gazing from one view point, and another, upon the magnificently situated city, as it lay clearly defined in the marvellously transparent atmosphere, and flushed over with warm, burnished sunset tints.

The day had been one of fine, startling contrasts; richest sunlight, and dark, heavy bursts of rain; storm-clouds brooding gloomily, casting deep violet shade upon the distant mountains; whilst here and there bright, golden shafts were breaking through; rainbows had rested on the hills, and spanned them in luminous archways, like the rich setting of a glorious picture. Lying in a triumph of colour, would be one portion of the landscape, whilst another was lost in driving mist and tempest.

The night deepened, grew infinitely lovely,

when the moon rose up the sky, pouring down pale, spiritual light upon tower and tree, and paving silver paths in the calm-flowing Adige; whilst there still tarried a faint illumination in the western heavens.

Loth to depart from so fair a scene, they lingered on, gazing and listening to the sounds borne by the sighing breeze of night. Something of enchantment was there in its pleasantness; in those notes of mirth and revelry; in those tones and bursts of music, which loudlier, or faintlier, swelled as the soft air rose or died.

“It was an hour when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.”

Amid her enjoyment of the scene, Lilius suddenly grew anxious about Mabel, who was standing beside her, her face averted, and wholly silent. The burden of tender care for her she had never cast off; as watchful as ever of every change in her countenance; her ear as acute to detect any sadness of tone. Now, her mind misgave her; she feared for her new-born composure, if she got mentally travelling from the present back, back to the past; and 'twas likely enough, under the influence of the hour and scene. She bent down, and softly whispered to her; one

glance was enough: the mournful eyes were streaming.

"Let us go, Lillas; I *cannot* bear it," said the catching, quivering lip.

Lillas raised her gloved hand, and pressed it fondly to her; then drew it through her arm, and said, she thought they had better return to the Albergo; it was getting late and damp.

Mr. Barry spent the evening with them, and the conversation got wholly unrestrained, almost gay in its tone.

Mabel found herself giving him a description of a pretty, picturesque scene they had come upon, in a village of the Bavarian Tyrol. Then, at Lillas's request, she showed him the sketch she had taken of it; that led to other sketches being looked at and talked about.

"Have your impressions of the Tyrol been agreeable, Miss Somers?" asked Mr. Barry, with his dark eyes fixed upon her glowing face ("fresh from Paradise," was his thought, when his glance first riveted upon its perfect beauty.)

"They have, indeed; but I do not think, on the whole, that I have admired any scenery more than that of the Vosges, or passed through any that I shall recal more."

"The Vosges, the Vosges,—Miss Somers is haunted with the Vosges," exclaimed Liliás.

"I am, almost, Liliás; the sloping hills and valleys looked so quietly lovely, that I cannot forget them, or help thinking that people must be very happy living amongst them."

"Now, confess, Mabel," said Liliás, laughingly, "that you actually coveted to have lived a few hundred years back, and played the part of *châtelaine* in one of those funny old castles, that seem just dropped down,—not built of ordinary stone, or by ordinary men, but dropped down on the heights, from goodness knows where?"

"I will not confess, Liliás; for you would only laugh at my thinking that it must have been really a very serene, pleasant sort of life."

"For serene people, very, undoubtedly,—a sort of limpet on a rock on a large scale. But how would it be for those whose spirits go quickly?"

"It would not suffice for you, Liliás, any way; and I have my doubts whether it would answer for you either, Mabel," said Charles. "There is no telling what social changes our simple journeying may bring about. Mr. Barry, Mrs. Abney has set her heart upon in-

roducing mulberry culture and the silkworm into England immediately. My ward, Miss Somers, has been visiting, not alone museums and galleries, but public hospitals and schools ; whether with a design to emulate John Howard, or to eclipse Mrs. Fry, I cannot tell ; but, putting that aside, I believe her first grand experiment will be the extensive cultivation of Indian corn ; because—look at the deep social and political economy of the argument—it makes such delicious bread.”

“Cousin Charles, you are intolerable !” exclaimed Mabel, joining in the laugh against herself, nevertheless. “Is there no means, Liliás, of preventing your husband holding us all up to ridicule in this way ?”

“You must set him at defiance. Wrap yourself up in a mantle of callousness—’tis the only way, Mabel.”

Rarely do Englishmen meet without some little reference to politics ; and the present meeting formed no exception to the general rule. It was a surprise to Mr. Barry to find the ladies of the party taking an interest in subjects such as he and Mr. Ferrand were lightly touching on—subjects and public questions, which, it is commonly supposed, ladies never do think upon ; and which, in-

deed, are so generally *tabooed* in their presence, as being utterly distasteful.

It struck him so forcibly, that he remarked upon it.

Smilingly, Charles said, "He feared it was 'o'er true' that they all of them had a little political bias. Even Miss Somers, he had noticed lately, taking very kindly to newspaper reading."

"I should imagine it a great pleasure and advantage too, to be able to exchange thoughts with your lady friends on the questions of the day," said Mr. Barry; "particularly as it is to be presumed the feminine mind views things more in the abstract, is not acted on by *cliquerie* or party, as ours is."

"Pardon me: feminine opinions and judgments are worth nothing, actually nothing. *They* jump, with a sort of miraculous rapidity, to a conclusion; whilst we toil after reasons, and examine evidence;—*they* build their edifice whilst we are only laying the foundation, or collecting materials;—'baseless fabrics,' I fear, theirs commonly are—rule and process altogether despised in the construction—no mortar or cement required for coherence sake—'tis needless—and they make bricks without straw!"

"Granted, for the sake of the argument," replied Liliás, who delighted in argumentation; "but you will not deny, that our conclusions, guided by a sort of instinct, or an additional sense, are worth quite as much as yours, arrived at by a process of reasoning?"

"But I do deny it though, altogether. Then again, Mr. Barry, women indulge in hero worship. From some mere chance, accident, or coincidence, they take a fancy to a character, straightway endow it with every earthly and unearthly attribute of good, and fall down in reverent homage immediately!"

"You colour—exaggerate, Charles. Women do not like from mere chance. Whether there is or not, we require to believe that worth exists, ere we do homage."

"Exactly. But then you are such credulous beings—easy of belief to an absurd degree—no acumen whatever, where your feelings are interested—'tis all impulse—no reason with you. Women are the warmest partizans, Mr. Barry; they would go through fire and water to serve people whom they have never seen!"

"With all meekness would I beg to observe, that *that* property ought to be numbered amongst our virtues," said Liliás, laughing heartily.

"Well, so it may be. I don't object to its being so classified; and, indeed, I consider that feminine weaknesses altogether, are more likely to lean to right than wrong, if they are swayed by stronger minds, wiser heads, and colder hearts than their own. There! I consider I have finished up with a handsome compliment to *les belles femmes*."

"Thank you for nothing," said Lillas, with a very saucy accent.

"I fancy I should rather like to foster that sort of hero-worship, if I were a married man," observed Mr. Barry, with a smile.

"You think you would probably reap the benefit of it yourself; but I doubt whether the rule holds good. If a man is not a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*, he perhaps is still less likely to appear one to his wife."

"What is your opinion on the matter, Mrs. Ferrand?" Mr. Barry inquired.

Lillas thought it was not a common circumstance to find heroes by the fire-side, where the minutiae and trivia of life formed the alone aliment for the heroism; that it required a more extended arena for its development than home afforded; she was almost afraid there were no home heroes to be found.

"Never were—never will be," responded Charles, "so hope it not, Mr. Barry; rely upon it, 'tis only

'Distance lends enchantment to the view.'"

So in frank and pleasant chat the evening quickly passed. Mr. Barry was on his way to join his mother and sisters at Rome, and Mrs. Abney was much pleased to find out, from some casual observations which fell from him relative to them, that she herself and Lady Barry had been fellow-pupils together for two or three years at Madame d'Arblay's; so, there was a bond of interest between them, directly, in consequence; and she grew quite vivacious in recounting one or two anecdotes of their school-day time.

It was late—past midnight—when Mr. Barry rose to take leave: gracefully he apologised for his prolonged stay; he had, he said, "been cut off from ladies society for so long a period, whilst he and his friends had been wandering about Switzerland, that it had given him very keen enjoyment of it that evening."

All shook hands with him when he said good-night, and they exchanged mutual good wishes, (he was leaving Trent with his party

at an early hour in the morning.) He turned again, as he was going out of the room, and said—

“Is it presumptuous in me, Mrs. Ferrand, to ask you to allow me the privilege of calling at Beechwood, when I return to England?”

For an instant, Liliás’s glance rested on Charles’s face; the response was satisfactory. Masonic, are the signs passing between married people.

Cordial and gracious was her reply.

“I think I may venture to say, Mr. Barry, that we shall all be glad to see you.”

“He’s a gentlemanly fellow,” muttered Charles (as though accounting to himself for the sanction he had tacitly given), when the door had closed upon their guest.

“He *is* very gentlemanlike, indeed,” responded Liliás; “I like him exceedingly.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“What is sleep? And what are dreams?”

MONTGOMERY.

TRENT is a noisy, revelling city—not very favourable to quiet repose—but it grew hushed and still at last, as did the Albergo; though lights were burning in two rooms long after those in the others were extinguished.

One was in Mabel Somers'. She was alone; seated at a table whereon stood an open jewel casket: a rich gold case lay before her; in it side by side, were two miniatures: a long braid of soft and glossy hair, like unto her own, but lighter by a shade or two, was wound round one of her white fingers; another tress, but shorter, darker, was held to her lips, and kissed with passionate fondness, and murmured words of undying love, as her tears rained fast upon it; quiver—quiver went her lips as they kissed.

Beside the miniature case, lay an open letter, and some withered flowers; and flowers, and letter, and hair tresses, and miniatures were all gathered up together; and anon

pressed with quick, fond fervour to her yearning bosom, and questions were poured out as to whether *they* had forgotten their child—their only one—their Mabel—her, whom they had bidden to come to them in Paradise? Had they forgotten her?

Such was her nightly habitude; her fixed gaze resting on those treasured things; her full heart for the time, no thought beyond them.

Let us look into the other room; 'tis the one occupied by the Hon. Wymonde Barry.

He also is up and wakeful; his brow is resting on his hand—his look fixed—every thought bent upon the fair young girl whom he had met, for the first time, that night; who had glided into his heart; whose beauty had sunk into his soul. Never again could he part with that fair image; secretly or openly must it be the one cherished object of his inmost devotion—of his manhood's love.

Her most winning pleasantness—her voice, which, with its silvery sweetness, so lingered on the ear; her sunny, gracious smiles; her whole person and demeanour, where grace, the most perfect, seemed lurking and living.

Womanly loveliness was it; yet with a heavenly stamp upon it, else, why did you

think of the viewless angels, when you met the expression of her starry and resplendent eyes—looked into their deep blue, shadowy depths?

He, till that day, almost that hour, had been ambitious; had thought to win himself a name of mark and likelihood, one that would stand out amongst men; but suddenly, when most unthought of, was he touched with an enchanter's wand, and there leaped into life, Love; not such as will grow, deepen into passion by power of time, habit, and acquaintance, but a lit-up fire, suddenly kindled, yet quenchless.

Away—away, the strong aspirations of his youth; faded and dimmed are they, under the glowing breath of the new-born passion.

There he sitteth a silent worshipper, eye fixed, breathing imperceptible, his very soul intent, for he is scanning the future as with a prophet's eye, compelling it to tell whether she, who must, who shall be his, is wholly out of reach.

Sanguine is he by nature, passionate, yet prudent, and rich in that unflinching courage which will scarce believe in failure; which, no way rash, prompts and impels a man to strive the most—to strive till he wins; so our silent worshipper beginneth at length to smile—he

weaveth golden hopes ; he beholdeth rapturous visions ; he sees her smile ; he hears her accents growing tender ; the pursuit is well-nigh over ; one fate, one destiny will be theirs—for ever.

A fever of blissfulness fills his veins, so he arises and throws open his window, to drink at the soft, "cool cisterns of the midnight air."

'Twas no marvel that when he slept, Mabel Somers was in his dream.

He knew her well, and loved her well ; together were they walking in a fair garden, where was all that could delight the sense, or gratify the eye. Soft music, in delicious waves of harmony, broke upon the ear ; now in dying cadence, falling, gathering anon into fullest, billowy swell of melody ; 'twas chorussed by the singing of a thousand birds.

Flowers, brighter, fairer than earthly sun had ever risen on, bloomed and exhaled on every side ; the gentle air, soft as love's sigh, was laden with their perfume ; the very path their feet were pressing was a rose path, clustering above them, wooing their hands daintily ; down under their light footsteps did those roses expand, and they were thornless.

Long did they wander together, taking no thought of time ; the swift-winged hours flew

by, leaving them each other. He, the lover, gazed into the sweet shy face on which soft blushes mantled, and on the rubied lips, which dimpled into a smile ever as he did so. Beating tumultuously was his heart, burning with sick impatience was he to tell her, aye to tell her, what indeed she knew, of the consuming love which filled his being; passionately he desired to read her soul, to know, past all doubt and fear, whether *his* name was written there?

But she, with woman's bashful, simple wiles, withstood him this, withheld him from it, yet not long—his was the master will, and he spoke.

Plucking a moss-rose bud, he tendered it to her, (trembling his hand, faltering his voice;) he asked if she knew the language of flowers, if she would receive that rose from him, if she would press it to her lips? he prayed her, he besought her so to do: impetuous he grew with 'wilderer hope — ardently he pleaded — entreating her to love him somewhat, who would love her for evermore.

No word she spoke, but her lips bent to the flower.

And with a cry of vehement joy, he clasped her—he clasped her in his arms, and she resisted not, whilst he tumultuously whispered,

“My own—my own, and none other’s—now, or ever.”

Pulses of gladness filled the pure blythe air, the soft music swelled to divinest sound, more than graspable delight filled his heart. Her gentle hand was resting in his—her fragrant breath fanned his cheek—her honied lips met and clung to his own—her sweet eyes mirrored his image in their clear depths—their beating hearts were keeping time together.

They wandered on in linkèd love, drinking from the fount of kind and passionate looks; whither they went they knew not, cared not; they saw that light streamed goldenly upon the path they were pursuing—and they were together. It was enough.

Suddenly, how he knew not, her hand was disengaged from his, and she was a little in advance of him. He quickened his step to reach her—severed must they never be—still she was before him.

“Do you fly me so soon, my Mabel?” asked he in accents of tender reproach.

But she turned not, nor regarded; and he, threatening her with Love’s punishment for breaking her bonds, her chains, pursued her with hurrying foot; but she was far away. He ran, toiled after her in vain; calling,

imploring, with agony and dim fear, that she would wait, stay for him.

But for all his entreating, she stayed not; her steps were surely winged; she was floating over the ground, rather than touching it.

He followed at breathless speed, scarce heeding the dark gathering clouds above him, or caring that all those pleasant hues of heaven and earth had faded; the vision-like beauty fled; that the streaming flood of golden light had given place to a weird haze and dimness; that those marvellous flowers were replaced by thorny plants and briars—though their spines caught and pricked him as he trod.

“What fearful thing is this which has come between us, my beloved? separate us it shall not. Oh try me not so cruelly, Mabel, my heart’s idol! Mabel, love, stay—wait for me!”

His tones were growing agonized; lost was he in dark amaze, strange vague fear. But an hour ago had she made sweet confession of her love, and now she was flying him. Over her had he no power. Supplicate as he might; even entreat her wildly as he did, *for their love’s sake*, still she never faltered.

Once, indeed, she looked back, as though

pain-pierced, heart-pierced by his cries of wounded, outraged love; and then he saw that she was very pale; her eyes looked heavy and full of sorrow; yet even then her foot stayed not.

Soon was there rising ground swelling before her, where vaporous shadows rested, and melancholy dyes. Dark and difficult seemed the path, but she ascended it, though wearily and slow. Heavy, and yet heavier grew her step, till she gained its summit, and there she rested. Love's very fondest blessings did he shower down upon her as he neared her. (Could she realize the torture she had given, she had not fled.) Never could she fly where he should not pursue, and win her back by the all-compelling might of Love.

A few more steps, and she would be fast, fast prisoned in his arms. Already were they outstretched to grasp her, when suddenly she changed; her soft eyes beamed with more than human brightness; her smile was radiant with more than human happiness; her head was wreathed with inwoven amaranth and gold; ineffable light was flushing everything around her; her garments became angelic robes.

With arrested foot he stood, whilst she,

fixing upon him her eyes of heavenly beauty, raised to her lips the crimson rose, his gift, no longer bud, but full-expanded flower; then gently waved it to him, in token of most tender farewell.

"She was no seraph, but his own—his own!" he cried, with frantic gesture; and would have bounded forward to snatch her to himself; but all strength was gone: *he could not move*. And now does music rise again; low, faint, unutterably sweet it floated round, deepening into a flood of harmony, filling earth and heaven. A burst, a swell of triumphal song poured out, like to the lofty strains of victory, or the festal melodies of multitudes, who, with rejoicing welcome, would greet and usher in the exulting lord of a magnificent, new-won kingdom.

CHAPTER XV.

"In the fair child's throbbing brow,
And wand'ring eyes, delirious fever burn'd,
And all night long from side to side she turn'd,
Piteously plaining." SOUTHEY.

ANOTHER fortnight, and the Ferrand party were again in England.

It was late at night when they reached Beechwood; the children, who had been brought home some days before, in expectation of their arrival, were in bed; but there was a speedy rousing up to greet them; such uplifting of round, chubby faces to kiss and be kissed, such caressing and nestling to them; such gazing of clear sweet eyes, to make sure that they had *really* come home at last!

Little bright Maud kissed and laughed and sobbed in a breath, for she had taken and nursed the fear in her loving heart, that they would never come back again; for the wind had blown so—some trees in the Park had been uprooted by it—and the sea was so

wide, and so deep, and so pitiless, that it would draw them all down to the depths where Sea-Kings lived, but where men and women couldn't.

Quite ashamed of the childish fear was she now, when they all stood before her; so she hid her face, whilst nurse told, how she had stood at the window, which commanded the best view of the avenue, from the time they were expected home. Several days had they been prevented by strong sea gales crossing to England; Mrs. Abney having an especial horror of a rough sea,—how she had started up, with wild screams from troubled sleep, exclaiming, that they would all drown and she should never see them more!

“But I can sleep now, Mamma,” she said, lifting up the blushing face from the pillow where she had hidden it; and fixing her eyes, which were almost too bright with excitement and joy, upon Lillas, whilst she kissed her with unnumbered kisses.

Soon she had Mabel down on the pillow beside her; whispering loving words, that just welled up from her childish heart: and asking whether she had done weeping yet; whether she was happy Mabel, again?

Quickly were they deep in conversation about the beautiful dolls, and toys of all kinds, that had to be displayed from the packing cases; early was she to be in Mabel's room in the morning, and see all the wonderful things brought for her and Ethelle, and that fat fellow, Baby.

But the morning came, without bringing little Maud's rap at the door, and soft tones asking if she might come in; the tender child was ill; again had she been starting up, and crying out wildly in her sleep, that they were drowning—drowning; her throbbing eyes could bear no light in the room; the house was going round and round, she exclaimed.

Lilias's cheek blanched, when their physician said, "He feared brain fever was coming on."

By night she was much worse, moaning and grinding her teeth incessantly. The most energetic means were needed and employed; but delirium, with but slight intervals of consciousness, came on; the child did not recognise any one.

Dr. Merridan was quickly over from Somerton, not only to see Mabel after her journey, but to make due inquiry about the sick child.

"I grieve to hear of the trouble that has

met you at your very threshold, Mrs. Ferrand," he said, most sympathisingly.

A hasty quiver passed over Liliás's lip, as she tried to answer him and could not.

"Will you go to her room, Doctor, and tell us what you think of her?" asked Charles.

Another day dawned, and there was yet deeper delirium; fearfully restless and perturbed, her arms were thrown wildly about in convulsive efforts to save them from drowning.

"They'll drown—they'll drown!" came constantly in shrill, heart-piercing cries. The sound of mighty torrents and mad ocean waves seemed never to leave her. The first medical aid in the kingdom was summoned—little indeed could be done; light was excluded, every word whispered, sound hushed, and the long golden curls which had hung so freely and gracefully about her little white neck and shoulders, were all cut off, that ice might be kept constantly to her head.

Mabel was always in the sick room; no step or touch as light as hers; with an instant's glance she had read the deep anguish that Charles and Liliás were enduring, and felt her own heart leap up and expand in the desire to comfort, to repay them back the

kindness and the sympathy they had lavished upon her. It was indeed a sad house; Maud had been endeared to every one in it, by her blythe spirit, her loving nature, and unselfishness. It was terrible to hear the moans and shrieks, and incoherent thoughts poured out; to listen to frantic cries for help against some one who was crushing down her head; to the mingling of little songs and prayers, followed by low mutterings and utter exhaustion.

Nothing could exceed the deep manly tenderness with which Charles upheld Lilius in this time of great sorrow and anxiety. When all was well, their assured and confirmed affection permitted a little negligence of manner; it made no difference, never ruffled the current of the healthy and vigorous sentiment; but now, he knew from the very constitution of her woman's nature, that her distress must be greater than his own; and he tightened his hold of her; gentle grew his voice in speaking to her; assiduously kind and consoling his words, even though he sometimes stopped short in speaking them.

Days passed; the fever still held its own, and raving delirium tossed the child's innocent mind continually. Neither Charles or Lilius dared to put in words the haunting fear that

must needs keep whispering to their foreboding hearts ; but Liliás turned from gazing upon the little sufferer, with bursts of passionate tears.

A change came at length—not what they had been watching, waiting, praying for—but a change to stupor. Those angry waves and billows vexed the child no more ; they had grown still, and brief time would now elapse before it must be known and told, whether that young life would be spared or taken. The silence of the house grew fearful. None *expressed* either hope or fear ; all-sufficient for the day was the evil, if it must needs come.

In grave consultation were the physicians. Charles was restlessly pacing the drawing-room, his countenance disturbed with anxiety ; but stopping now and then to speak to Liliás, whose head was bowed down on her trembling hands ; Mabel was hanging over her with tenderest love and pity. A bell rang—the consultation was over.

“I will go alone, Liliás ; I will be down with you again, instantly,” said Charles, an indefinable expression flitting over his face.

A mute gesture of assent was her answer, and he left the room.

Changed, indeed, was his step and countenance when he returned. Lillas did not look up; nay, she buried her face more closely, as though to bar out the possibly fearful tidings he might have to tell.

He whispered, as his arm passed round her, "My Lillas, we may hope."

The words she did not hear, but understood the tones; and there broke from her a low tremulous scream. Another and another followed, and then a flood of tears, ere the deep, fervent, thanksgiving words could come.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Every day
A little life; a blank to be inscribed
With gentle deeds.”—ROGERS.

TEDIOUS and slow was Maud's recovery: for she had been in the very jaws of death; but Mabel never wearied of service upon her; never slackened in her gentle ministering to each want and wish. “She was a born nurse,” they all said; and Mabel smiled when she heard it, and bade them “beware of interfering with her vocation as regarded Maud, for she was her own special charge, and none other's.”

“Let her have her own way in the matter,” said Dr. Merridan; “anything more salutary or healing for her own mind than her solicitude the child, there could hardly be.”

Deep was the thankfulness in the hearts of Charles and Liliás; the destroying angel had passed by and exacted no tribute. They might count their jewels, and find not one missing. Faint, and weak, and pale as their little Maud was, still she *was* recovering—

could bear the light of heaven once more in her room, and knew them all again—could smile and look at them, though it was bewilderingly, as if she had been lost in dreams which had not quite been shaken off. Pleasant, indeed, it was to feel her little hand, grown moist and cool, and listen to her soft, calm breathing, after that terrible scorching fever and wandering mind.

After Maud was pronounced out of danger, and would allow herself to be left, (a gracious sort of despotism did the dear child exercise, not relaxing any of the honours of invalidism,) she granted leave of absence to Mabel, to go over to Somerton, to see her people.

Smiles and words of hearty welcome met her at every turn. Her first visit was to Widow Collins, (John died the night they reached home,) for whom every arrangement had been made. Striving and industrious, she was placed in a position, where the exercise of those properties would be certain to ensure a respectable livelihood, and bread for her children, till they could win their own. The three eldest she was at once relieved from the charge of: one, kind Mrs. Geary took into her household, to be trained and taught; another went to Dr. Merridan's for the like purpose;

and the eldest, Ruth, who was clever with her needle, was sent to an approved milliner and dressmaker, with a view of her entering Miss Somers's service as *femme de chambre*, when competent for it.

It formed no part of Mabel's plan to do away with the necessity for self-helpfulness; it was impressed upon the people, that *her* assistance was only a means to an end; *that* end was, being independent of assistance.

Her next call was upon the widow Ashwell, of the Crowhurst Farm, that she might make acquaintance with her five orphan grandchildren. Every one of them did she see; one was a mute, another without reason.

Brisk and cheerful looked the Widow; smilingly she told Mabel, "that things seemed to take a turn for good, from the very day that she had had the interview with herself, it had put so much spirit into her. Then, she had never before carried home such a harvest as this year's; it was so well got, and so abundant; her barns and storehouses were overfull; her corn-stacks beautiful to see."

So Mabel walked round the rick-yard with her; where was, indeed, a goodly sight, and plenishing of long and rounded stacks piled up. With a complacent eye and shrewd

calculations, as to what they would bring in, did the widow scan them. From the rick-yard to the poultry-yard was but a step ; and no one could help admiring the flocks of geese and turkeys, which were striving with most praiseworthy diligence to fatten themselves for sale, and achieve money for the notable dame's pocket, with a degree of self-abnegation delightful to contemplate.

Then she desired mightily to show her cheese-room ; and there did they go—Mabel to admire its marvellous cleanliness, and listen whilst the widow discoursed at length upon the fine quality of her cheese, and the good price she expected to get for it.

“ Her heart was quite set upon gain now,” she said, with a hard sort of smile ; “ she wanted to pay her way, and to pay her debts, and to keep her head above water, for the time to come ; and, God be thanked, she saw a chance to do it—she'd take care it didn't slip through her fingers for any want of hard-working and striving : if she was but a young, able woman, she shouldn't mind ; or if the oldest of her grandchildren (the boy John), had but his senses, like other boys, so that he could take things off her hands by-and-by—he was a well-grown lad, and might now—

he'd count fourteen years next Christmas—he almost earning his living, if he had but his wits."

The boy, who had been following them about from place to place, like a spaniel, began to laugh and vociferate till he almost screamed, when he heard his grandam speaking of him.

"Don't, John, my boy, Miss Somers doesn't like to hear you; go away, there's a good fellow."

But John was not inclined to go, and laughed and gabbled on more loudly than ever. So the dame fetched the poor little mute into the room, and, talking to him with wonderful quickness upon her fingers, bade him take his brother away. The sad-looking face of the mute lighted up with intelligence, and, placing his hand in John's hand, he led him out unresistingly.

The scene was inexpressibly grievous.

"If I'd time to fret, Miss Somers, I should never have done with it: but I haven't time for anything of the kind."

"It is *very* sad for you," observed Mabel.

"God help me, it is! but I think the saddest of all is, to hear that boy laughing at his own silliness—but, poor fellow, he doesn't

always laugh : he has glimmers of sense breaking through sometimes, that show him his own condition ; and he suffers very much then, I'm sure. He always leaves the house when the glimmer comes, just steals in to sleep, cowers before us all, as it were, and goes off again in the morning before it is light. What he does with himself I cannot tell (he won't let anybody follow him ; it seems to drive him almost frantic if we offer to do so), but I fancy he just lies down all alone in the woods, and battles it out till the glimmer goes again, and then he's comfortable once more. He is very harmless, and very good to his deaf and dumb brother. They seem somehow to understand each other in a way that the rest of us can't. And John's very kind and good to all little children. You see he's strong, and can help them. Twice, he has risked his life for them—once, in saving a little lad from drowning, and another time, in fetching one right from under a savage bull's feet. The men that saw it, were running here and there for pitchforks, before they durst go near the furious beast, who was kneeling on the child and ripping it with his horns, when John happened to go by. He was over the hedge in a moment, and lighted on his feet close to the bull, who was

roaring dreadfully, and seemed mad with delight at having something to tear and hyke. John, as quiet-like as possible, took hold of the child to raise it, and the bull got up from his knees and walked away. Never was such a thing seen, Miss Somers. It was as if the fierce brute knew that John was silly, and under the special guard of Providence. He's a clever boy with his hands, and, when the industrious fit comes, works hard. He can make pretty baskets—the gipsies have taught him to do that. I don't hinder him going amongst them when he likes, for he must be doing something."

They were still standing in the cheese-room whilst all this was being told; but they now went down to the old-fashioned parlour, where Mabel partook of some new milk, from the dame's prime Alderney, and some excellent brown bread and butter, which she heartily enjoyed, and as heartily commended.

The widow's face glowed with pride and pleasure, at her young lady's availing herself of her unpretending hospitality. Gracefully did the little condescension come from Mabel.

But the conversation was not yet done: Two little girls, twins of eight years old, who had previously been passed in review, were

again brought in, and desired to show their copy-books, specimens of their knitting and sewing, and also to read aloud to Miss Somers.

Little Sarah and Betsy—thanks to the village school—came off with flying colours, and, after receiving a few kind words of approval from her, were marshalled out of the room again, and the conversation recommenced.

“Then you quite understand me, Mrs. Ashwell,” Mabel said, as she at length rose to leave, “that I take charge of the education of these two little girls? I shall inquire for some excellent school to send them to, till they are fifteen: by that time we shall see for what they are most fitted.”

A little look of doubt passed over the other's face. She hoped they would not be educated above their station, she said; “that they wouldn't be taught to be above getting their own bread, for they *must* do it.”

“Either with head or hand,” replied Mabel, with a smile. “We will give them a thorough education, and teach them and train them to rely upon themselves, upon their own doing and striving, for the rest.”

Warmly and gratefully were the widow's

thanks expressed, as she accompanied Mabel to the gate, where her carriage was supposed to be in waiting, but where, indeed, it was not ; for the coachman had formed his own private opinion as to whether his young mistress *ever* meant to come out of the Crowhurst again, and acting upon that opinion, had gradually extended his drives up and down, till the carriage was now only just visible in the extreme distance, driving from instead of towards the Crowhurst.

A look of almost annoyance flitted over Mabel's face : she had other calls to make ; and what would that dear little exigent Maud say to her prolonged absence ?

The witless boy had again followed them ; and surely he was not so witless after all, for, when he saw that look, he, without a word of bidding, set off at full speed to recal the carriage, and soon, by loud shouts, made the coachman hear. Heated, and breathless with running, he returned, and Mabel thanked him, as she would have done any one else, right pleasantly and graciously, for his spontaneous service. The boy laughed and chuckled, and turned away from her, but quickly came back, carrying a remarkably pretty willow basket in his hand, and shyly, but not awkwardly,

tendered it to her. Mabel looked at the widow for explanation.

"He wants you to accept it, if you please, Miss Somers: he makes many of them."

Again were her gracious thanks given to the boy, as she took the basket from his hand, and again did he laugh and chuckle heartily. It felt heavy, and she raised the lid, to see if there was anything within. With a sudden exclamation of fear, and a strong impulse to throw the basket from her, she beheld a dark, ugly, coiled-up thing, covered with bristles.

The dame's face flushed scarlet when she saw what it was that had caused Mabel's hurried words and start of affright; but it waxed hotter still, when the laugh of the witless John rose high and loud in derision of her fear: it seemed to throw him into an ecstasy of delight: he laughed till the echoes rang again.

"Oh, pray, Miss Somers, don't think anything of it, if you please. How dared you do it, you naughty boy?"

"What is it, Mrs. Ashwell?" inquired Mabel, still scanning the coiled-up thing with a very dubious look.

"It's only a hedgehog: he catches a many for the gipsies. I hope you will overlook

it in him, in consideration of his silliness. How *could* you be so silly, John? Do let me throw it away, if you please—a nasty, ugly creature:—to think of him putting it into *your* basket!”

She looked with an air of irrepressible vexation at the luckless boy, and proceeded to lay violent hands upon the hedgehog.

“Stay, I will keep it, Mrs. Ashwell,” said Mabel, now examining it with much curiosity. “I have never before seen one. How long will it be before it uncoils itself? Why does he catch them for the gipsies? what do they want them for?”

“To eat them.”

“Eat them!” exclaimed Mabel, with a horrified look.

“Yes, they roast them with the skin on; and excellent eating, they say, they are.”

Here the carriage drew up, and Mabel, carrying off basket and hedgehog too, got in; the distressed Mrs. Ashwell's apologies and excuses following as long as the sound could reach her.

It was a great disappointment, on calling at the Moat, to find the Doctor from home, as she much wished to see him; but she nevertheless alighted, penned the following note,

and left it beside the open microscope in the study :—

“ DEAR DR. MERRIDAN,—I flattered myself that I had arranged my call most diplomatically—that I should be certain at this hour to find you at home ; and I am disappointed not to do so, as I much wished to see you, to ask your opinion, your advice, and your assistance.

“ I have just left the Crowhurst—have been indulging in a long talking and planning with the widow there about herself and those poor children. She seems to have great good sense and good feeling ; but she surely ought not, at her years, to have such heavy responsibility resting upon her. Now, it was about the eldest boy that I desired particularly to have your advice : he is, I suppose, very deficient in ordinary understanding ; ‘ silly ’ is the widow’s term for it.

“ Is there not an establishment somewhere in England for the reception of such-like unfortunates ? We heard very much respecting one in Switzerland, whilst we were there, of the marvels elicited by suitable training : Dr. Goggen or Guggenbühl—‘ what’s in a name ? ’—is the founder of it. You doubtless know all about it.

“ Will you, in some leisure hour, see this poor boy for me ; and kindly tell me what you think are the best steps to be pursued to bring him on a level with the rest of us. Gratefully the widow mentioned that both you and Mr. Geary had promised to assist her in procuring a presentation to some Deaf and Dumb institution, for the poor mute when of a suitable age. So in your hands I leave *him* ; and take the imbecile boy as my *protégé*.”

“ I must beg you to make me a long visit soon. I have some architectural plans come from Town that I should wish to show you, and learn your taste and opinion, thereupon. I shall leave upon your library table some microscopic specimens, which came in my way oddly at Inspruck ; and also some dried Alpine plants, for your herbarium—one or two of them are rare, I fancy ; at least they were new to me. In the confusion and distress attendant on our little precious Maud’s illness, they have been well-nigh forgotten.

“ That *she* is regaining strength now, day by day, we can and do very plainly see ; God be thanked for this, His most special mercy to us. It has been arranged that she goes to Hastings as soon as she is pronounced fit to travel. Mr. and Mrs. Ferrand and all go, save Mrs. Abney

and myself. We avail ourselves of the time to pay our promised visit to Northcote and the Manor. I feel that we have scarce arrived at home ere we are on the wing again; but these are, both of them, visits that ought to be paid; scarce optional.

"As we shall not be long ere we leave, and it is certain to be some weeks' absence, let me challenge you to a game at chess, the first evening you can spare?"

"Believe me to be, dear Dr. Merridan,

"Your very grateful and obliged,

"MABEL SOMERS.

"P.S. Did you know that Gipsies eat hedgehogs?"

Frankly did Mabel confess, when she at length reached the Rectory, where Mrs. Abney had long been waiting her, that she had been a shameful time.

"My patience has been worn quite threadbare, Mabel," she said, when her niece at length made her appearance.

"I don't wonder at it, I am sure, dear Aunt; and what will my little tender Maud say to me? Do let us make haste home now!—we shall have no other hindrances."

But another detention came. The kind

Rector took her into an embrasure of a window, and spake with her in an undertone; "he wished a private interview—he would come over to Beechwood if she would fix a day and hour."

"Nay, you fix the time yourself, dear Sir, and I will observe it."

"Shall we say to-morrow, then;—and twelve o'clock?—will that suit you?"

"Perfectly; I shall quite expect you."

They drove rapidly home, but it was dark ere they reached Beechwood. Mabel's light foot was through the vestibule, up the stairs, and in Maud's room as soon as light foot could be. The glow from a bright fire fell upon the child's face as she lay reclining on a couch. She had been—yes, there was no denying it—she had been weeping.

"How is my petted child, my darling, my *joujou*?" Mabel asked, as her arms wound round her; "the slave of slaves has come, to sit at the feet of her princess, once more."

"Too long—too long away from me;" and the dear eyes filled again in tender reproach.

Lavishing caresses, raining kisses on the child, Mabel confessed her fault, and was after a time forgiven; the naughty little pouting lip broke into smiles again.

“ Now that you condescend to smile upon me once more, Miss Maud,—a sad jealous little heart of your own, I foresee you will have,—I will show you what a sweet new pet and plaything I have brought in this pretty basket ; he is such a funny little fellow, with bright black eyes, and droll paws, and comical ways of his own ; I have promised him, that he shall be treated with every regard and kindness for his peculiar notions. *There* he is : what do you think of him ? ”

Wonderful interest was excited by the hedgehog and his odd manœuverings ; he was quite the lion of the evening ; the children pronounced him—

“ A dear, sweet, angel hedgehog ; the completest darling that ever was seen.”

CHAPTER XVII.

"A Christianly plainness

Clothed from his head to his feet the old man of seventy winters."—LONGFELLOW.

THE Rector was punctual to his appointment, and after a little general conversation, entered upon his subject. Touchingly did he speak of his long connexion with the parish of Somerton; of the deep interest with which he had laboured in it; of the fruit he meekly trusted those labours had borne; of the peaceful happiness which had there fallen to his lot.

In sorrow did Mabel listen to the request he came to make, that she would appoint his successor to the living of Somerton. She opposed it; he urged it.

"I wish it earnestly, my dear Miss Somers, though, I have God to thank that my sight has scarce grown dim, or my foot failed; and, it may be, that there are years of usefulness still in store for me; yet there may not be; and I do, indeed, feel most desirous that my successor should be appointed—should be, at

least, in readiness to care for my flock when I'm removed. I should wish to know him ; and to be assured that my place will be filled by a zealous ministering servant of the Lord."

"Your wishes shall rule us in the matter, dear Sir, but will it not seem like superseding you?"

"Not at all. It was the olden custom for a succeeding priest to be appointed ere yet another had done ministering in the temple ; and I should wish it to be followed in my own case."

"Is there any one, Sir, whom you would wish appointed?"

"*That* is a very kind question ; but I have neither right nor desire to take advantage of it ; there is no one whom I would either hinder or recommend. You will not experience much difficulty in filling a living of fifteen hundreds a-year," he added, with a quiet smile.

"Then, if you will not aid us, dear Mr. Geary, we must seek for some one as closely resembling our present beloved pastor, as possible."

"Thank you—thank you very much.—I think I will hazard one caution ; or, perhaps I may venture to make it a request, if you will

permit me so far to have a voice in the matter. I should be grieved to think that my flock would be committed to the charge either of an indifferent, careless minister, or to that of one leavened and tainted with Puseyism. I see you smile at my fear of such a thing."

"I smiled to think how lukewarm a welcome any one holding Puseyite opinions, would find amongst us, dear Mr. Geary?"

"I trust I am not departing from the Christian charity I would most especially wish to inculcate towards all men, in making this request, but I feel impelled to do it. So many of our young, and indeed, most active, zealous clergymen—let every man have his due—are fashioning themselves after Rome; thrusting aside the Bible, crying up the obsolete rubric, church discipline, and such like minor matters; that it is needful to guard the fold; and I would earnestly ask you not to appoint *any* such, nor, indeed, let it pass into the hands of any striver after spiritual domination,—it is a crying sin of our church at this time;—no priest, be he Romish, or be he Protestant, is commissioned by God, to stand between His children and Himself; spiritual pride, and high-mindedness, are the chaff and husks of religion.

"Seek for one who will be a doer and a worker, one able to discern brothers in Christ, and fellow-heirs in glory, in all good men, whether of our own Church or not. Away with these narrow enclosures, this shutting up of heaven: one sun shines on us all,—one Christ smiles on all who war against self, and do the right.

"I, my dear young lady, look back upon a long life; threescore and ten years, chequered with joy and sorrow, as are the years of all, have been mine. Gazing calmly back upon the path I have traversed, I see how I have deviated, here and there, from right. We all do so: well is it for us to learn meekness, and charity therefrom.

"These many years have taught me the great worth and weight of charity—or, as it might be more properly translated—love. Love, in word and deed, is the essence of the religion of our Lord and Master: doctrine is nothing, faith is barren, unless filled with the living life of love to man, as well as to the Lord.

"Love is the brightest star in the firmament of Christianity. But I am wandering sadly from my subject, growing garrulous, as most old men do," he added, with a smile.

Benign and beautiful was the aged pastor's countenance, as he sat conversing with her; tender, fatherly, and yet serious his manner, as became one privileged by his office to gently and unobtrusively approach the thoughts, and hearts of those committed to his ministry.

"Ah, my dear," he said, when he rose to depart, "how you will love your Bible, if it should be your lot, to look back upon life as I do, through the vista of seventy years! how you will love it and rest upon it!"

Numerous were the architectural designs looked over and rejected ere Mabel decided on one she cordially approved; but a selection was made at last, and she herself laid the foundation-stone of a memorial to her father.

Consecrated to *his* memory; yet not ending there, but fruitful of good to others, as his life had been. It would be endowed, and was intended for the reception of four widowed gentlewomen, who, from reduced circumstances, might gladly avail themselves of such a home.

The selected site was high, and commanded splendid views on all sides, save one, where the Somerton woods stretched from far, up to the very door. The building would be of pure white stone, was designed to be of a highly ornamental character, and from its conspicu-

ous position, would be a landmark to all the country round.

Whilst laying great stress upon its external beauty (her father's love of the beautiful had she inherited), Mabel by no means forgot to plan and direct for the comfort of those who were to inhabit it; plenty of air, light, and space, were the orders more particularly to be attended to.

The day was fixed for the family dispersion,—the Ferrands to Hastings, Mabel and her aunt to Northcote, Sir James Dysart's residence on the western coast of England. Some undefined reluctance had taken possession of Mabel's mind in regard to this visit; but her guardians thought it simply right that the very cordially urged invitation should be accepted, and her own sense of what was fit and due to her uncle, told her the same thing; and yet she felt reluctant still.

On the day previous to leaving, she walked into the village of Beechwood to see Margaret Fisher, the lame governess. In that woeful abstraction of sorrow which had come so suddenly, and in the after distress and confusion attendant upon Maud's alarming sickness, Margaret had been forgotten; Mabel had not

seen her since that evening, so merry with song and dance.

Neat, and tasteful, was her little cottage : the small garden in front was enclosed with pretty rustic paling, and the door was gained by a trimly-shaped porch, fitted with shelves for flower-pots ; many flowering plants bloomed in the clean, bright windows, which were shaded by cheerful chintz curtains. It needed no prophet to tell, that it was not the abode of rude or vulgar minds. The door stood open ; everything was perfectly still : so still that the tick, tick, of the clock was audible as Mabel stood under the quaint porch. Thinking that none of the household were about, she walked right in ; there sat Margaret at an easel, drawing, her back to the door, and her attention so absorbed, that she did not notice Mabel's entrance, who quietly advanced, and looked over her shoulder.

At last, with some slight sound or other, she raised her eyes, and, with a half-cry of surprise and pleasure, saw who her visitor was.

"Indeed, indeed, Miss Somers, I am so very glad to see you ; but it was so rude to let you stand there, without taking any notice."

"Nay, the rudeness is mine, Margaret ; I

ought to apologise for coming in without rapping, but everything was so quiet, that I concluded you were all out of the house. Now do not disturb yourself in the least, I am happy to see you thus employed ; may I look at your drawing ?”

The pale girl flushed to her very temples, at being caught, as it seemed, in that occupation. She was copying a head of the Madonna ; timidly she showed it.

“ I have but slender skill in drawing, Margaret,” said Mabel, after examining it, “ but it seems to me that you are doing this well, very well.”

The bright flush came again, but this time it was all pleasure. Improved was Margaret’s appearance—she looked happier, in better health.

“ How is your knee going on ? I take shame to myself, that I have never named you to Dr. Merridan ; but I have had much both to occupy my thoughts, and to do.”

Soft and low grew Margaret’s voice, as she said, “ We all know, Miss Somers, what a heavy grief has fallen upon you. When I saw you before, I thought you looked too bright for sorrow to touch you ; yet it soon came.”

“ We will not speak about it, Margaret ; we

will speak of yourself and your drawing. I see you are getting much interested in it."

"She was, indeed," Margaret said; "so interested, that she often forgot that she was lame; nay, almost forgot the gnawing pain, though it was sometimes so agonizing that she could not even draw; then there was nothing for it, but to resort to her large doses of laudanum."

At Mabel's request, she showed all the sketches in her portfolio, and began to tell, with a strangely embarrassed face, about receiving a London parcel, which she found, on opening, contained everything needful for a young beginner in drawing. There was nothing whatever to intimate who had sent it, and she had felt greatly perplexed; there was no one, save Miss Somers, who knew of her feeble attempts.

"I see you look suspiciously at me, Margaret, so I may as well confess that it was sent by my order. I wrote for it the morning after I saw you."

Spite of herself, her voice grew tremulous, as she spoke of that morning; she tried to force back those hurrying tears, but they would have way; she rose from her seat, and walked to the window.

With delicate sympathy, Margaret placed a glass of water beside her on the window-seat, and resumed her occupation. And after a little, Mabel turned to her again, and once more began to speak; no reference did her words bear to the emotion she had betrayed.

"I do not flatter you, Margaret, in saying that there are evidences of talent in your drawings; but there are also many faults, such as you could not fail to fall into, without proper instruction. Would you wish for an instructor—do you think—do you feel that you could excel?"

"I believe I could, Miss Somers. Beautiful designs and forms are for ever floating through my mind; they cry out, to get clothed with a body and a shape, ere they are lost again, but my hand has no skill to depict them, so they go away into nothingness."

"Why, you are quite an enthusiast, Margaret! but you must remember, there is no easy, royal road to excellence in painting, you can reach it only by the most patient, painstaking, day-by-day industry. Are you capable of it?"

Modest, but resolute, was the reply.

"Then shall you lack no means of getting on. I will write to one, whom I know to be

a talented instructor, to come to you every week. But we must first get your health improved, if possible; illness makes sad work with time, you know."

"It does; but I have ceased to hope for any amendment. I've grown *to* the pain and suffering."

"We can but try—and we will. Dr. Meridan dines with us to-day, and I shall speak of you to him; he will serve you, I am sure, if he can. Good-bye, Margaret."

She shook her by the hand and passed out, ere the grateful-hearted girl had time to utter a word of thanks.

In grievous trouble was Maud at Mabel's leaving her; twenty times had she asked and been assured that Mabel would immediately come to her, if she were ill again—that telegraphs and expresses should be instantly set to work to bring them together again.

"No one must nurse Maud but I, myself, because she is *my* child, my own blue-eyed darling; but she is not going to require nursing, she is going to get strong and well, and keep her heart brimful of love for Mabel. Do you hear, pet mine, brimful it must be; full as this cup, which see, will not hold a drop more?"

"Of course; of course I shall," replied Maud, with an air.

Joyous and merry, loving and kindly was the fireside that night. That young autocrat, Frank, was enthroned on Mabel's lap, whilst she proceeded to ask all sorts of funny riddle-marees, and droll conundrums, and puzzles, out of a book.

The seniors of the party gradually got drawn in; first, suggesting answers to the children, then interested into guessing for themselves. A set of wise-looking people they were, who, with knit brows, and fixed attention, were striving after solutions to enigmas and charades, that would have reduced *Cedipus* himself to despair.

The delight of the children knew no bounds, when Dr. Merridan first halted, then fairly gave up at the dark question,

"What was Joan of Arc's straw hat made of?"

Vainly did his mind grapple with it—his wits only floundered about in seeking to penetrate the intricacy, fathom the subtlety of that most curious inquiry; 'twas all in vain, no ray of light *would* dawn. So he gave up, saying, "that it was really of no use whatever his trying to find out the mystery, for

he had never guessed a riddle in his life; besides, he was not so well up in Joan of Arc's biography as he ought to be, and more than that, he was not acquainted with the peculiarities of ladies head gear."

What a laugh circled round, to be sure; but most of all laughed the Doctor; peal after peal came, as he sat twirling his spectacles with such velocity, that it was next to a miracle they were not entirely disjointed, and ejaculating, "Straw, straw; who would have thought it?"

Then afterwards, Mabel read aloud a little story to Ethelle and Maud, who listened with exemplary attention till it was done. "It was a pretty story," then said the wise Ethelle, "where did she get it from? out of Gammer Grethel?"

"No, I wrote it for you last evening."

"Oh! that was being very good; you shall write one for us every day."

"You shall, you shall, Mabel," exclaimed pet Maud.

"Great thanks to you, young ladies."

"And the next shall tell us what became of Miss Prosey-dosey, and Chuffy."

Mabel and Mrs. Abney were early *en route* the next morning, after an overpowering leave-

taking, kissing and weeping; kissing and weeping were the children, kissing and weeping was Mabel.

“ Would it never be done ? ” asked Charles at length, waxing impatient. He travelled with them till they reached the station nearest to Northcote ; there they found awaiting their arrival, Sir James Dysart’s servants, and a richly appointed equipage. Charles saw them off, and then resumed his journey back to Beechwood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Indeed he hath an excellent good name."

SHAKSPEARE.

"How could I think my uncle so cold?" said Mabel to herself, as, with most bland and smiling courtesy, Sir James received them at the entrance of the stately baronial house of Northcote.

"Ah, I see all the rich bloom and beauty are come back, that had played truant when I saw you last," was his greeting as he pressed her cheek, and led her into the lofty hall, whose walls, hung round with armorial shields and quarterings, bore testimony to many a high alliance.

Very cordial was Lady Dysart, and Mabel's many cousins seemed to vie with each other in the warmth and *empressement* of their welcome.

"It is quite an annoyance to us, my dear love," said Lady Dysart, "that all our family are not here to meet you; but Priscilla and Mr. Vavasour are entertaining company at

their own house, though we expect them to join us in a week or two. Our eldest son, Henry, is now abroad; and Riverstone is detained by his duties as Chaplain to the Bishop of —, but he will be here soon, for he is most anxious to see you."

Quite too sensitively alive to kindness was Mabel, not to be both pleased and prepossessed. In accepting the invitation to visit them, she had expressed her wish not to enter into society at present, frankly stating that it would not be agreeable to her feelings to do so.

"They were gay, company-loving people," said Lady Dysart, in her reply, "but Mabel's wishes and tastes should rule them entirely during her stay. It should be quite a home party. Their object in wishing to see her so earnestly at Northcote, was that they might get thoroughly acquainted, know her well, and love her."

But little intimacy had existed between the two families. Sir James, Lady Dysart, and their eldest daughter (now the Hon. Mrs. Vavasour,) had occasionally spent a week at Somerton. But Mabel herself had never previously visited Northcote. For one thing, the two houses lay at widely-separated parts of

England; and for another, there was little in common between Sir James and Mr. Somers: the one was filled with pride of place, and class, and ancestry; the other's expanded mind had small sympathy with narrow or intolerant views of any kind, or on any subject.

A spacious and handsome residence was Northcote, with much of the ancient castellated character about its external architecture and outward aspect; but within, glittering and sumptuous rooms succeeded each other, filled with all the elegances and *convenances* of the present day. All things were in keeping for a large house and large establishment.

Mrs. Abney was much prepossessed with Lady Dysart, pronounced her a truly agreeable, charming person; in the course of a few days they had become the best friends possible.

"I fancy Sir James is quite a changed person," she observed to Mabel; "I had used to think him very stiff and unpleasant, when he visited us at Somerton; quite too unbending and stately, you know: but one is so apt to run off with erroneous opinions. He is really most gentlemanlike and courteous in his own house."

The daughters, of whom some were younger,

some older, than Mabel, were very accomplished, fashionable-looking girls; not beautiful, but pleasing in appearance, dressing with great taste; and their manners and deportment, from mingling much in the gay world, were polished and self-sustained, without a touch of affectation.

With a palpable desire to please on one side, and a perfect readiness to be pleased on the other, there was soon abundant good will established between the parties. Mabel really liked her uncle and cousins, and felt that Lady Dysart was most assiduously kind.

In compliance with her wish, they gave no parties; two or three more at dinner occasionally, was the extent of the company they received. Quietly and agreeably did the days go by; excursions were made to different note-worthy places in the vicinity, and they walked and rode a great deal. It was a beautiful neighbourhood, the scenery varying with every wind and turn of the road: Mabel was delighted with its changing aspect.

Reading aloud, music, and conversation furnished employment for the evenings; though Sir James not unfrequently got chess-playing with Mabel, or chatting with her, whilst Lady Dysart and Mrs. Abney would be seated

together at the same work-table, talking Homœopathy, or the Grape Cure, which Lady Dysart had imbibed a degree of faith in.

An odd blending and mingling of subjects there was, undoubtedly, from the various groups into which the large family party was split. With the young daughters—fashions, novels, and the last new opera formed the staple. Sir James discoursed much of old county families and untarnished pedigrees, with the, perhaps, natural pride of a man who traced his own up to the time of the Conqueror.

But a moment's lull or pause of the others, and the hiatus was certain to be filled up with matter relative either to Drs. Globule and Triturate, or to the wonderful, nay, marvellous efficacy of simple grape eating. Never was such a medicament as the grape, almost incredible the good it did. You commenced by consuming, say, the moderate quantity of five pounds a day; but "appetite grew with what it fed on." Without a suspicion of gluttony, you soon averaged a dozen, nay, fifteen pounds in the twenty-four hours. You ate from morning-tide to even-song: you ate them sitting, standing, walking, reclining, kneeling down at your devotions—indeed 'twas almost a part of them,—in bed, and at board; and

when you had accomplished your task, why then—then you began again. One day was like unto another. Beautifully simple was it in theory and practice; a child might understand. The command was “to eat the grape, and let the grape be eaten!”

So you ate, and ate, and ate, till you found yourself in a state of the most redundant health and strength.

Politely, but with wholly unbelieving ears, did Mrs. Abney listen to Lady Dysart’s measured talk upon the matter; to her it savoured of quackery, which she held in righteous abhorrence. They had heard much of the grape cure when in the Tyrol, but she had looked upon it as one of the passing absurdities of the day. Crude, indeed, must be the theory which prescribed no medicine, published no diet table; whose beginning and ending was bread and the grape.

Mabel told her aunt, *she thought the Doctor was avenged*.—The sun was shining cheerfully into the morning room, where were seated Miss Laura and Miss Susan Dysart, one copying music, the other drawing. They had been speaking of Mabel, of her sweet manners and very lovely appearance, needing only the advantage of a London season or two, to make

her perfectly delightful. Who must present her to the Sovereign? Must it be their sister, the Hon. Mrs. Vavasour, or their near connexion, the Countess of Langdale,—whose card, by-the-bye, lay not with the indistinguished heap in the silver card-basket, on the hall table, but thrown by itself, so that any one passing through the hall would probably see it; solitarily did it lie for a week, till joined by that of the Duchess of Powderham, and those of a few other titled personages.

Indeed, Lady Dysart had no reason to be ashamed of her visiting list; they received, and were received, by the first families in the county.

"I do hope Mabel will not wear such deep mourning very long; it is so dreadfully unbecoming," continued Susan the elder one, to her sister.

"Why, she might leave off *crépe* now: she has worn it quite a decorous time," replied the other; "but does she not appear to you to be excessively sentimental?"

"Let me advise you both not to let any of your surmises be heard by your cousin; she has been very peculiarly brought up—not had *your* advantages," said Lady Dysart, who had, unobserved, entered the apartment; "keep in

mind that we wish to conciliate in every way, for Rivers' sake——”

She abruptly ceased, for Sir James and Mabel stepped in at the open window, from the grounds where they had been walking; even as she spoke they were there.

“What a soft, bright day for December,” she said, turning to Mabel, with a transient colour flitting over her cheek, as the possibility of her words having been heard crossed her mind, “I am sure we ought all to be out. What are your wishes, my love? We will arrange the morning as you like best.”

Laughingly, Mabel declared her inability to come to any decision on the point.

“Use your power whilst you may, dear Mabel,” exclaimed Laura; “when Rivers comes he will want to draw you, and all of us, to the schools and cottages. In training the young idea—in visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and comforting the sorrowful, lies his beau ideal of a morning's employment.”

“When will Cousin Riverstone come? I am quite anxious to see him,” said Mabel, truthfully and simply.

And she felt so; for so much had been incidentally said about his zeal in his ministerial duties, and of the deep sense he enter-

tained of their responsibility, that she not only felt prepared to like him, but the thought had several times presented itself to her mind—"might he not prove a fit successor to the inestimable rector?"

On the same day that he arrived, came also Mr. and Mrs. Vavasour, and the third son, Colburn, from Eton.

Mrs. Vavasour had more decided pretension to beauty than her sisters: she had a fresh, clear face, with fine, large, busy-looking eyes, and great vivacity of expression; her figure was slight and round, her movements easy and natural; a very lively, piquant manner, and a quick, ever-ready smile to second her words, or herald them, were hers also.

Her Honourable husband was well-looking enough, good-natured, good-tempered, but an indescribably dull person—making fearfully long speeches, which his vivacious wife cut through the middle without ceremony, and without a shade of resentment from him. Indeed, his compound nature of kindness and dulness, made him most plastic in her quick, clever hands. She had married him for love and a fine estate. He had wedded her, because he believed, in his heart of hearts, that there was not another woman in the wide

world, to compare with Priscilla Dysart for cleverness and agreeableness. The impression was in no way weakened now, after some years' companionship. She was indeed much too sensible and shrewd-minded to allow him to think otherwise.

"I will not wait for any one to introduce me. You are Mabel Somers, and I am Priscilla Vavasour," was her gay presentation of herself to Mabel, when they met in the drawing-room; "I have seen you often as a child—you were beautiful as an angel—and I have quite wearied for a meeting with you since. 'Mid a thousand should I have known you. Some faces can be never forgot. George, this is dear Mabel Somers!" said she, calling her husband to her side.

Mr. Vavasour bowed low, and commenced something about "Immense pleasure and honour done him, and having known the late Mr. Somers——"

With most finished neatness, however, did Mrs. Vavasour decapitate his speech.

"Now, Mabel, another introduction waits you. Come here, Colburn! This is a rude Eton boy—another of *us*. Does he not look a pickle? a downright naughty, bold fellow, as he is? There, don't blush so, Colburn," she

added, as she patted the boy's smooth cheek fondly with her hand; "I declare there is quite a suspicion of whiskers on your face, boy! There, go away! No longer must you be a pet of Priscilla's, with those hideous things making their appearance!"

Mr. Vavasour laughed a most stunning laugh at his wife's aspect of horror at her discovery. He himself had very neat whiskers, and looked down with a sort of lofty pity upon the unfortunate's vainly essaying the hirsute adornment.

With an air of unbounded interest did Mrs. Vavasour settle herself into a low seat beside Mabel, and commence a long, animated chat. Impossible was it to help liking her, her looks and words were so very unaffected and frank.

"I have been sitting with Mrs. Abney in her dressing-room for the last hour, and a great gossip we have had. A shameful loss ours has been, in having seen so little of you all, dear Mabel. But then, you know, our homes are so far away, and I am the busiest creature—but never never will we lose sight of you again, my sweet young cousin. Sworn friends will we be from this time forth. Ah! here comes Riverstone—Rivers is his house-

hold name—let me commend it to your favour.”

The young Clergyman advanced towards Mabel with extended hand, and cordial smile. “Wait—wait, Rivers,” laughed Mrs. Vavasour, “you are surely carrying the benefit of clergy too far, in thinking to know our cousin without a proper and legitimate introduction:—May I venture so far?” she asked, looking at Mabel with eyes sparkling with fun, “ah, I see an affirmative on your countenance; so come forward, Rivers.”

Kindly was his pressure of her hand, as he smilingly carried it to his lips and said, “Indeed, they had been strangers too long.”

Mrs. Vavasour gave up her seat to him, declaring that she must go, and see who her excellent husband was boring now, and lightly tripped away, in his direction.

Mabel and her cousin soon fell into conversation; he took her into dinner; and kept by her side the whole evening. His appearance was imposing; nature had been lavish in her gift of personal adornments. A marvellously handsome face was it, his features well cut, and regular: a large massive forehead, fine searching eyes; good hair and teeth; his voice was rhythmical and admirably inflected, every word, to

the most inconsequential, fully sounded, not a syllable lost ; but Mabel—like most persons of quick perception, noticing voices very much—fancied, that with its almost melodic sweetness, it fell upon the ear coldly. The eyes, too, clearly, brightly blue as they were, seemed rather to be reading *your* thoughts, than revealing his own ; neither was the smile of that heart-beaming sort, which ever brings forth smile in return, the intelligible token of a smiling nature, to which you at once respond. Singular oneness of look and expression was there in his countenance, that of intellect without passion ; mind unswayed by feeling. Youth tempered him now, but with years he would harden into a sort of marble enthusiast ; unyielding—concentrated. Yet was he very agreeable, his manners not too much tinged with the cloth.—He officiated in the Parish Church on the Sabbath ; faultlessly did he go through the service ; attitude, gesture, elocution, all unimpeachable ; the sermon argumentative and good ; the voice, scarce one in a thousand could equal it, and yet he stirred not the heart's depths. Scenic, it was not ; but the whole show was intellectual : reminding you from analogy, of polished steel ; or of the brilliant, but impassive mirror.

Much time did he give to study ; and most assiduous was he in visiting the poor around Northcote ; no part did he take in the amusements the others freely entered into ; his duties might not be set aside for such things.

A party had been arranged for visiting some picturesque ruins, lying a few miles away ; and Mrs. Vavasour said she *would* try to persuade Rivers to accompany them ; he led the life of an ascetic. “ Does he object to *all* amusements ? ” innocently inquired Mabel.

“ Not at all for others ; and he himself enjoys society exceedingly, but he has acquired such rigid ideas respecting ministerial duties ; and considers that the whole time ought to be devoted to their fulfilment.”

“ It’s all new-fangled nonsense of his, Priscilla,” put in Mr. Vavasour, looking up from the “ Farmer’s Journal,” he had been perusing ; “ Rivers was very different a little time back ; liked fun as well as anybody——”

He was proceeding, but his clever wife dexterously nipped him in the bud, by some question respecting his book ; and then diverted his attention to a letter in the Times, which she handed to him, to look over ; and the subject dropped.

Shortly afterwards the door opened, and the handsome Rivers came in ; again was the head uplifted.

“ It’s quite time you made your appearance, Rivers, the ladies are all bemoaning your monastic sort of life. I confess I don’t myself understand it. Is it some new fashion fresh from Oxford, that you have taken up with ? ”

An angry gleam for an instant crossed the young clergyman’s face ; but he schooled himself ; calm as usual was his voice, as he replied,

“ That he was not aware of there being anything remarkable in his endeavouring to fit himself for his duties.”

“ Oh ! nothing—nothing ; indeed ! quite right and proper ; only with you it seems such a sudden conversion. I thought perhaps you might be turning Puseyite, as that seems the last new fashion for the clergy, and your Bishop encourages that sort of thing so much. What *is* the matter, Priscilla—what are you frowning at me for ? ”

“ To make you give over talking, George. I am wearied to death of hearing about Puseyism, it meets one at every turn.”

“ I know nothing about it, and care less, but I thought that perhaps our——”

“ No more—no more, I do beseech you,

George. I vote that we order the carriages, and get on our bonnets, we shall lose the best part of the day."

Quite a picture was her countenance; she was quite too good-natured to feel altogether angry with her well-meaning husband, (every one would acquit him of *malice prepense*,) but he was fearfully wanting in tact, horribly inapprehensive and stupid—there could be no denial of it.

Dull as he was, Mabel and he had become excellent friends; for an hour at a time would he entertain her with diffuse details of his agricultural experiments, of the wonders performed by a steam plough, or of a new method of dressing wool. Mrs. Vavasour complimented her highly on her powers of endurance.

"You are an admirable listener, Mabel; I have not seen you yawn once under the infliction of my good bucolic George's prosing."

"I assure you, Priscilla, I am quite interested in Mr. Vavasour's conversation—he tells me so much that is new."

A gay laughing glance of disbelief was on the sprightly lady's face as she said, "Really, Mabel Somers, you are just and only the most lovable girl I ever saw in my life to *say so*."

About Somerton and Mr. Geary did Mabel and her Cousin Rivers get chatting one evening. She drew an eloquently-worded picture of him; of his devotedness; his charity. He knew every man, woman and child in his flock; he preached sermons in his own life as well as in the pulpit: he did not stand upon a high spiritual platform; he was with his people and of them, she said.

"You are quite sure, dear cousin, that you are drawing from the life?" he said with a smile; "there is nothing mythical—nothing of the ideal in that description of your rector?"

"No one has less gift than I have at imagining characters: you shall see the delightful original himself when you come to visit me at Beechwood, which you promise to do in the spring."

From one thing to another they at length got to Puseyism: purposely had she led to it—regretfully he spoke of the secession of so many of the clergy to the Romish Church.

"What is it in the Established Church which makes the clergy so dissatisfied with it?" Mabel asked.

"The Church is now so *very* low in her

requirements, cousin—parleys so with dissent—that zealous men cannot brook such condescension, and rather than submit to it, they join a communion that does not admit of the right of private opinion.”

“Do you approve of their doing so?”

“No. I think it better to endeavour to purge our Church of her latitudinarian doctrines, and heresies, rather than desert her service.”

“Does, what you call, parleying with dissent, impair the wide usefulness of the Church?”

“It places her in an altogether wrong position—‘lost—lost,’ we may cry when she does that—fallen from her high estate; the Church is the alone fount of doctrine, of saving belief and faith; there cannot be two ways of salvation; she alone has it; all other teaching is error, fatal error.”

“May we not think for ourselves in the least? you know we have the Bible to refer to, which is surely as high and sacred an authority as the other?”

“Nothing must be of private interpretation, the Bible itself tells you.”

A sudden recollection of the conversation

she had held with Mr. Geary upon a similar subject, and the very diverse sentiments expressed by him, made Mabel's cheek dimple; her cousin saw the smile, and his colour rose.

"But no two of the clergy teach alike; what are we to do in the dilemma? In *what* lies the objection to people (whose judgments are exercised and proved in all the important business of daily life), reading, pondering, and, Bible in hand, meekly drawing conclusions for themselves?"

"It must never *be* in matters of religious belief: it is a province of human thought sacred to the Church; she alone is authorized and divinely missioned to unfold the truth."

"But the Church is composed of the people as well as the clergy; the people *are* the Church in fact, are they not?"

"Pardon me, but you are, indeed, very heterodox—you will change your opinions, I am sure, dear Mabel. Let me tell you, what I consider to be the essence of true religion; it is to believe and to adore, not to scrutinise and debate. Far too intense, too absorbing a sentiment is it to permit of dissent; or sectarianism; such, is wholly abhorrent to the mind; if

you are right, *all others must be wrong*, and shunned as evil."

"But does not such a state of mind seem very unchristian-like and wrong? a sort of spiritual dogmatism, not at all desirable or right. Then, again, cousin, if none are to think, only believe and adore, who is to lay down the one immutable form of belief, which all must bow to?"

The Saviour said, "Hear the Church."

"But *which* Church? That of Rome—our own English—the Scotch—the Greek—the Lutheran? We found when we were in Scotland—somewhat to our astonishment—that we belonged to those classed as dissenters."

"I know of but one worthy of the name, that of which I am an unworthy minister. As individuals, we are nothing—servants of all; but as a collective body—a Church—we look upon ourselves as heaven-founded, and heaven-directed; and may not suffer ourselves to be set aside."

"Well, I cannot believe that intolerance and spiritual despotism can be other than essentially irreligious and wrong. Something to be risen up against, and shaken off—mind owes fealty to God, not to man."

Again he coloured ; but he had been trained to self-command, and his voice retained all its gentleness, as he said, pressing her hand at the same time, with much show of kindness,—

“ Forgive me, dear Mabel, if on hearing you speak thus, I recal to your remembrance how young you are to express these very decided opinions against those of holy——”

“ Nay, nay, that is not fair. If you are really going to reproach me with my youth, you will silence me at once. But now, do tell me why people may not think for themselves in religious matters : you say they *must* not—but why not ? ”

Smilingly and gaily did Mabel carry on her argument. Cleverly did he parry her attacks, meet her reasoning ; every now and then bidding her recollect, what a young girl she was to sit in judgment on matters over which holy and exalted minds, had thought and pondered for a thousand years.

At length, with the merriest glance, and in a half-coaxing sort of voice, she asked him, “ If he were a Puseyite ?—was he one altogether, or only a little imbued with it ? Would he kindly tell her ? ”

Once more the indignant colour rose.

"It is a frank question, Mabel, and deserves a frank reply. I have been thrown much with that section of the English Church, yclept (for lack of a better term), Puseyite. As yet I have no decided adhesion to, nor yet prejudice against—if anything, I lean to it, from personally venerating the men at the head of it: they are equally an honour to the Church and to mankind."

"Are you studying theology, Mabel, that you catechise our young divine so?" asked Sir James, who had quietly sauntered up to the couch, on which the two were seated.

"We have quite used up our subject now, uncle, and have ended just where we began," she replied, making room for him beside her as she spoke.

Sir James gave another turn to the conversation, which quickly became very cheerful and animated, when Mrs. Vavasour, who had been playing *écarté* with her good, stupid George, joined the group.

Good night had been said, and the party dispersed to their bed-rooms—all save Sir James and his son Rivers. Ominous was the cloud resting on Sir James's brow, as he

listened to what his son was saying—listened with a cold, unmoved countenance, and smileless lip.

He himself spoke at last—not many were his words, but they were of the sternest—

“I did not know till this evening that you were one of the babblers. But you must pay the penalty of your childish folly and petulance. I hate a tortuous path, 'tis so degrading. But your own indiscretion has made it so, and you must track it.”

“I will try in every way, Sir, to retrieve the error into which I have fallen,” said the young clergyman, his cheek burning with annoyance and vexation; “the only excuse I can advance, is the excessive provocation and audacity of her language—the disguised scornfulness of it. But still I know that I ought to have exercised more self-control.”

“Women *will* talk—it's their nature, and there is no hindering them; but the world looks for more discretion from *men*, Rivers,” replied Sir James, with bitter sarcasm. “I should scarcely have expected to see *you*, with your talent, baffled and turned at bay by a young girl's raillery and *badinage*. But take care and make the best of your position as it

stands now—make yourself personally agreeable to your cousin—you can, I presume? The sex all love attention, pay it to her.”

“I will, Sir. Mabel is far from being an ordinary character. With all her smilingness, you see she thinks—has a penetrating and decided mind.”

“The very reason why you should have been on your guard with her,” sharply replied Sir James; “you had the ball at your foot, Rivers—the Somerton living as your first step in Church preferment; and then, as a probable consequence, Mabel’s hand—at least, if you had known how to improve your opportunities, it would to a certainty have been yours; but for the sake of indulging your peevishness, you have made one matter difficult, the other unattainable.”

The young man had winced, again and again, at Sir James’s coldly scornful manner; but he replied now with some spirit,

“I don’t take to Mabel at all, Sir; she is as little suited to me as I am to her. I could never marry a woman who expressed her opinions with the presumptuous arrogance that she does: it is most unbecoming.”

“Mabel Somers is one any man might be

proud to win and wear, Sir; aye, even my own superlative son would have been honoured by her acceptance. You speak like a coxcomb, let me tell you, Rivers; a character I have a thorough contempt for. But enough of this: though, now we are upon the subject, let me name to you—as you seem to have so little rule of action—to be so at the mercy of your temper,—that clergymen are *expected* to marry well. Let there be no false step *there*. You understand me, I see. And for this other matter, this Puseyism, it must be given up.”

“I cannot give it up, I am pledged to it.”

“Do not interrupt me when I am speaking. I say it *must* be given up if it stands between you and the Somerton living. Brought up with such strict, narrow ideas as your cousin has been, she would as soon think of a presentation to Diabolus himself as to you, with an avowed Puseyite taint about you.”

“Well, if given up now, it will be resumed again when the time is ripe for it,” replied his son, with a sardonic laugh, and an almost hateful look passing over his handsome face.

“I’ve no wish to learn your tactics,” returned Sir James, coldly. “If Puseyism per-

mits, it must justify such conduct; the world would apply a harsh term to it. But this is your business, not mine. You well know I have always thought you made a very false move on your outset in life, in joining this brawling, but really powerless party. I do not say it was wrong—that is your look-out—but worse, it was foolish; an error of judgment I had not expected from you. You should go with the stream, not with the insignificant streamlet.”

“The streamlet *may* become the stream.”

“It may do so; but—”

“Aye, and it will. Not always shall we work against the wind and tide,” returned the young minister, triumphantly and exultingly. “The Church has been meek and humble too long; ’tis time she took her place in the economy of nations; her hour will strike at last.”

“‘*Ex pede Herculem.*’ The sun rises and sets as usual.”

“There is silence before the earthquake,” retorted his son, with flashing eyes.

“Have a care, my brave young sir, that you and your chosen friends are not lost and buried in the *débris*, in the dust and pother

that yourselves create. Never were the times less favourable, in my opinion, for the uprising of an arrogant and imperious priesthood; but it concerns *me* not. I shall compose neither pæan nor dirge when the struggle comes," said Sir James, with an air of cool, almost contemptuous indifference, as he rose; and lighting a taper, departed to his chamber.

END OF VOL. I.



